

A Young Man's Memoirs on  
His Escape from  
South Korea





미군 나가라!

우리의  
념원은

전투환타도하



# A Young Man's Memoirs on His Escape from South Korea



Foreign Languages Publishing House  
Pyongyang, Korea  
1989







## **To the Readers**

Why did I escape from south Korea? This is the theme of my long memoirs.

I deserted the south, which is regarded as a burial ground for human beings, and went to the blissful land of the north, the land of hope lit by the sun and stars. This turning point in my life is coloured by a thousand and one events.

There would never be an end to it if I were to write all about the circumstances under which I was compelled to escape. Here I recall before anything else the precious teaching of the great leader President Kim Il Sung which says:

"In south Korea, countless people go about begging with cans in their hands, many dying under bridges from cold and hunger....

"In south Korea today, large numbers of children and young persons cannot go to school, and students even sell their blood so as to be able to pay their school expenses."

In short, south Korea is a living hell unfit for human habitation. There is a saying that we must learn the whole truth from a single piece of information. So I would like you, the readers, to judge the whole of south Korea by a few facts I am going to relate briefly in these memoirs. If you can read south Korean life in the faces of its young intellectuals and passionate students who have declared themselves against their dark society and are going out to meet a bright new future, I shall be very glad.

At first when I was asked to write this book, I had some misgivings about my ability as a writer. But I was driven forward by an urge to give the readers even some slight idea of south Korea I had forsaken.

Although my writing leaves much to be desired, I nevertheless hope that the readers will go through my memoirs to the last page.

Kim Yong Son







# CONTENTS

<b>1. Where Has My Noble Ambition Gone Now?</b>	<b>1</b>
Soaring Dreams on the Banks of the Han River . . .	1
A Shattered Dream at School . . . . .	9
Student Employment . . . . .	15
The Last Lesson . . . . .	21
The Will of My Former Fellow Pupil . . . . .	27
<b>2. Is a Man a Commodity?</b> . . . . .	<b>35</b>
Weights and the Prices of Human Bodies . . . .	35
"Street No. O of Hell" . . . . .	40
Placing My Last Hope in an A-Frame . . . . .	47
A Life Fettered to Debts . . . . .	57
Can the Poor and the Rich Live Together? . . .	63
<b>3. The Land of Prison</b> . . . . .	<b>70</b>
"Ten Caution Diseases" . . . . .	70
Behind Bars at Night . . . . .	77
The Manufactories of Corpses . . . . .	84
<b>4. Save Korea</b> . . . . .	<b>91</b>
"My Country Inhabited by Aliens" . . . . .	91
Around the Base Settlement . . . . .	98
The Streets Where the Japanese Are Swaggering	
About . . . . .	103
"Let Us Restore Our Self!" . . . . .	108



<b>5. On the Burning Streets</b>	<b>118</b>
The Flag	118
Prison Diary	126
"Pigeongram"	138
Among the People of the "Garbage Republic"	143
<b>6. The Drift of Public Sentiment</b>	<b>150</b>
Recruited under Other's Name	150
General Assembly of "Food Stealers' Party"	158
"Anti-Communism" and Silla Restaurant	164
<b>7. Following the Sun, Following the Star</b>	<b>174</b>
The Milky Way	174
A Child's Mind Cannot Be Bound	184
At Pagoda Park	191
My Last Night in Seoul	199
Across the Deadline	210



# **1. Where Has My Noble Ambition Gone Now?**

I, too, had a noble ambition. But my hopes were dashed and nothing but its miserable shadow was left in my broken heart.

Who could know how the merciless chains of cruel fate would bind the wings of my soul that was flying high in the blue sky?

## **Soaring Dreams on the Banks of the Han River**

There is a saying that teenagers live on hope, youths in their twenties on ardour and people in their thirties on discretion. Is this why the heart of a teenager swells with a happy dream?

I had in my mind a beautiful dream which rose like a bank of clouds. I lived in a wooden shack in Yongdungpo Ward, Seoul, experiencing the sorrow of a pauper, but my hope for learning was great and I entertained a beautiful dream. It seemed not for nothing that the teenage stage was called the dream stage of human life.

Times were hard, but how beautiful was my dream of realising my desire for learning and attaining my noble ambition!

My first dream was to go to high school and then university. A son of an ironworker, I had finished primary school and nursed my simple first aspiration.



My first dream came up against a hurdle at the entrance examination for high school. In a society where money is mightier than merit, would it be possible for me to gain a place at high school, admission to which entailed keen competition among large numbers of candidates? This was my worry. But I had finished middle school first in my year and so my hope flourished like a seed in spring.

I was sitting with my heart trembling in the fifth examination hall on the 20th of December when the first frost of the winter was falling. Soothing my excited nerves, I took up my pen. The questions were easy and I wrote down the answers fluently.

The invigilator saw that I was the first to finish writing and looked at my paper over my shoulder. Then he studied my face closely as if to impress it on his mind. The invigilator appeared to be a kindhearted teacher and he looked at me with smiling eyes. It seemed to mean, "Though you are shabbily dressed, you are an excellent pupil."

I was sure I had passed the examination. Nevertheless I felt very nervous because the school was keener on squeezing money out of the lean purses of people, like milking a cow, than on cultivating the intelligence of its pupils.

I came second in the examination for admission to the "S" High School in Seoul. The names of the successful candidates were displayed on the wall by the main door of the school. How happy I was on that day!

I am an only son. It was the greatest desire of my family that I, the sole heir, should go to university. This was true of my father, an ironworker, whose back was bent by hard work, and the same was the desire of my



mother who would secretly shed tears of sorrow over her unpleasant job of cooking for a rich family. And even my younger sister, who, having left primary school, was doing odd jobs to earn money entertained the same hope for me.

My mother and sister, who had rushed to the school, were so glad and moved that they were constantly wiping tears from their eyes. Much more so was my father. That was the first time I had seen them so happy; they had always been depressed and sunk in grief. And I thought to myself, "Has there ever been such a joyous event in our home?" I felt as if I were dreaming.

An acquaintance of my father's, the managing director of a bank, came and told us that I had been accepted by the school because my examination results were so extraordinary. We were told that my name had been entered reluctantly on the list of successful candidates for my real worth thanks to the consideration of the invigilator, Teacher Choe, who had marvelled at my examination paper, and other teachers.

So I was just saved from being rejected. The thought of that made me shiver. In a society where money and power reign supreme, how could a young man at the bottom of the social scale with neither money nor power hope to enter school with ease? Thus I just managed to pass the hurdle of the entrance examination, called the "examination war".

That day the school grounds were crowded with hundreds of people, parents of the candidates, who were pouring into office and lodging protests with the school authorities as if by agreement. The reason was that some boys who were poorer at school than their sons or who had handed in blank papers were among







the successful candidates on the strength of money. "Is it money or free ability that speaks in the entrance examination?" they shouted and began a sit-down strike demanding that the results of the examination be published.

It was not for nothing that the parents of the candidates were indignant. Their protest was a kind of accusation against the social absurdity of almighty money buying even human souls and certificates for going to a school. "Money opens the door to the Heavenly Kingdom," and "If only you have money, you can even buy God," were sayings frequently on the lips of people. Money shadowed students. It pursued them wherever they went.

Having so nearly failed to get into the school in the face of the unlimited tyranny of money, I heaved a sigh of relief. Was this what they called luck? Could there be a cleft in the stone wall? I thought to myself. I felt as happy as a flowering plant which could just stretch its leaves through a cleft to get the sun.

Chang Sol, a son of the president of a civil engineering company, walked past me and got into a car with his mother. As he did so, he glanced at me and called out:

"Hey, Yongdungpo fellow! It looks like you've made a go of it. Maybe your luck's changed, pauper."

After uttering these stinging words, he sped off, raising the dust. What an unbearable insult! Staring fiercely at the disappearing car, I spat in disgust.

"The social institution by which you despicable fellows lord it will collapse like a rotten tree some day. Time will show!" I thought to myself.

Barely hiding my indignation, I left the school. The sardonic remark of the son of the moneybags had



spoiled my humour. I clenched my fists with a determination to pursue my studies with such superhuman energy that this society of iniquity where money could buy everything—personality, intelligence and power—would envy me. At any rate my ambitious dream of studying soared high. I felt as though I could fly up endlessly into the blue sky of learning on the wings of a strong will.

That day I went out to the sandy beach of the River Han with Jong Ho, my classmate at middle school who had passed the entrance examination to high school at the same time as I had. We strolled together along the sands. A raw river wind was blowing, tousling our hair. We walked hand in hand endlessly along the riverside; we were great friends.

“Jong Ho, let’s be good pupils to please our poor fathers and mothers,” I said looking sideways at his tousled hair.

“Sure, although it was difficult to get into high school let’s finish top and second in our year. Let’s excel in our studies so that fellows like Chang Sol become green with envy,” he replied, tightening his grip on my hand. He had also come very close to being struck off the list of successful candidates by the freak of money.

“Right, let’s show them that boys from poor families can be brilliant students.”

After walking aimlessly we sat down on the sand and watched the desolate evening scenery as the sun set on the banks of the Han River. While taking in the evening view of the river, we started talking about our ambitions.

Jong Ho’s aspiration was to become an officer on a trading ship after finishing high school and college. He wanted to make money on voyages to foreign countries



and to buy fine things so as to please and make life easier for his widowed mother who had sacrificed much on account of him. It was a praiseworthy idea.

I, too, spoke of my aspiration.

"I would like to become a journalist after graduating from university," I said.

"A journalist? That's grand. You want to make yourself famous by your pen, do you?"

"No. When I say I will become a journalist I mean digging up all the evil things around us and publishing them in newspapers."

"Splendid! Is that your own idea?"

"No. When I was leaving middle school, my teacher suggested it to me."

"Do you mean Teacher Kang?"

"Yes. He was a very good teacher."

We remembered the Korean language instructor who enjoyed the confidence of the pupils. My heart yearned after the teacher. If he knew of my passing the entrance examination to high school, how delighted he would be!

The day before the leaving ceremony, the teacher in charge of our class had spared his time to take a walk with me by the pond in the Changgyong Palace Grounds. In that crowded place he had told me to take a close look into the pond. I could see nothing but pretty flowers on the pond. The flowers had unusually large leaves, which were floating in an attractive way on the water, reminding me of the mystical flowers in a fairy tale.

As I was unable to see anything extraordinary or instructive in the pond, my teacher patted me fondly on the head and told me in his familiar, gentle voice:



"Yong Son, don't see only those flowers. They, too, have their own special physiology."

"Do you mean the physiology of flowers?"

"Yes. The slime in which those flowers are rooted is filthy beyond compare. It reeks. But how beautiful the flowers growing out of the filthy slime are! Though they all rooted in the mire, the flowers are attractive and adorn the pond. That is what I mean."

The teacher was right. The flowers' physiology had a deep significance. But I could not get the teacher's point—Why did he want to make me understand the "physiology of flowers"? When his eyes met mine staring intently at him, Teacher Kang resumed, walking slowly along the edge of the pond:

"You, too, must bloom into a beautiful flower like those. This world is dirtier and more unfair than the slime of the pond. If you live honestly in this filthy society, you will be able to bloom and become a beautiful flower like these here. If you live honestly like those flowers in this dark world, you can avoid being polluted with the filth of the dirty society.

"If you hope to grow into a fine man, into the passionate man who is wanted by our times, you should live stoutly even in this stinking social climate. You should live honestly, conscientiously, for justice and with high aspirations. He who lives a false, vain and fast life is no better than a dead man. This is what I want to tell you before you leave school. Do you understand?"

This was the kind wish of the thoughtful teacher.

"I understand, Teacher!" I replied.

"In the absurd society of south Korea where money rules supreme, you should not dream of attaining personal wealth and glory but should rise from its dirty



silt as the flower does. And then you should clear away the dirty silt."

His words held a profound meaning. Truly he was a kindhearted and upright teacher.

I strolled around the pond for a long time deep in thought. I resolved to be a true man by learning purely and honestly with the "physiology of flowers" in my mind as the teacher had told me. I thought I would have to study harder than others because I was poor.

Hearing my still vague aspirations, the teacher suggested to me that it would be a good idea to become a journalist who could expose all social injustices.

The words of Teacher Kang returned to me with renewed force on the day I was admitted to high school. Turning over the profound meaning of his words in my mind, I walked along the sands by the River Han with my friend until it was dark.

Evening darkness was falling before our eyes as our great hope of learning flew high with its wings spread wide.

## **A Shattered Dream at School**

Someone once said that if one wants to understand a country, one should visit its schools and see its children first of all. So, education can be regarded as a mirror reflecting the true state of affairs and as the epitome of the country.

My first lesson left a deep impression on me. The classroom was so much like the one at middle school, and this was contrary to my great expectation. The class comprised 90 pupils. It was an "outsized class", an



“overcrowded class”. Being a high school located in the heart of Seoul, I had expected it would have cosy classrooms with modern equipment. But my expectation proved too naive.

The classroom was stuffy and had an offensive smell. The disappointing scene made me recall the ceremony for leaving middle school. There was no classroom or hall big enough to hold a leaving ceremony at middle school, and so the ceremony was held over a loudspeaker. A “leaving ceremony over a loudspeaker” sounds like something befitting the electronic age. But below the surface it turned out that the leaving ceremony was a desolate scene about which it was impossible to have any romantic idea, attachment or reminiscence. The headmaster sitting in the instruction section office delivered his congratulatory speech through a microphone while the school leavers listened to his “voice” absentmindedly sitting at their desks in the classrooms, hardly realizing it was a leaving ceremony. There were no pupils seeing off their “elder brothers and sisters” who were leaving the “dear classrooms”. There was no atmosphere of a leaving ceremony in which those leaving call to the other pupils in tearful voices, “Farewell my younger brothers and sisters, and dear classrooms....”

While the “leaving ceremony over a loudspeaker” was held, the parents of those leaving were unable to attend because the classrooms were too small and they could only watch the scene in the classrooms by standing on tiptoe in the corridors; some of them were even crowded out of the corridors and had to wait for the end of the ceremony in different corners of the schoolyard.



The classroom in which I was now sitting presented a scene similar to that of the leaving ceremony at middle school. Although the classroom was crowded, my dream of learning was flying high. So, I was impatient to discover the ability of my new classmates. Coming from different areas, they differed in their ability. The teacher in charge of our class, who taught history, made us read a few sentences and tested our ability at mathematics in order to find out how capable we were. I was amazed at the intellectual levels of the pupils who answered. Some of them could not so much as read a textbook properly and some others did not even have an elementary knowledge of multiplication and division. I recalled some lines from an article I had read in the newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo*, which said, "In this country there are middle school pupils who are incapable even of reading Korean letters properly, high school leavers who are incapable of division, and university graduates who are unable to read daily newspapers. An education crisis is menacing this land and is a danger that is on the eve of becoming a catastrophe."

Seen in this light, the schools were no more than "diploma factories" as they were labelled critically in the town.

During the first lesson I was somewhat disappointed at the surprisingly low quality of my classmates. When we were leaving the classroom at the end of the first day's lessons at the high school, the head teacher came and made his first demand that we pay our school fees and membership fees of the education association. No sooner had the new pupils appeared in the classrooms than they were assailed with demands for the payment of money in the name of school fees. After the head



teacher had spoken, the pupils showed their first reaction. One pupil rose and asked:

“So we must pay eight per cent more school fees and five per cent more education association membership fees than before?”

“That’s right. How can the school fees and education association membership fees stay at the same level when prices are rising? Don’t complain and be sure to pay them by tomorrow.”

With this the teacher disappeared hastily from the classroom. He looked as cold as a snake. The pupils buzzed. My head was swimming. So now I had to pay between 130,000 and 200,000 *won* a year by way of fees. How could I get such a large sum? With the thought that I would have to ask my parents for money on my first day at my new school, I felt everything going black before my eyes. I seemed to see the worried look of my father and the panic-stricken eyes of my mother and to hear the sigh of my younger sister.

I trudged home. Entering the house, I threw my bag on the desk and sat in silence. I looked worried. Mother and sister watched me. They seemed to be asking if anything was the matter at school. Having paid my school registration fee, my family had not a penny left. So, I could hardly tell them that I should have to take money to school the next day to pay more fees for fear that I might cause my mother greater anxiety.

My mother gazed at me with tears in her eyes; probably she could read my mind, torn as it was by worry about the fees. Dead silence reigned in the house. After a while my mother asked me in a tearful voice:

“My boy, is there anything the matter at school?”

Her voice trembled slightly with anxiety.



"No, nothing, Mother."

"Yes, there is, I know. Tell me about it."

"Oh, Mother. Don't worry, please!"

"My dear son, you once said you would tell your mother everything, didn't you? That you wouldn't conceal anything from me no matter how embarrassing it might be to tell me."

My mother's sincerity silenced me. It seemed that in a poor family the ties of affection between the parents and children were all the stronger.

"My dear Yong Son, let's wait and see if Father comes home with a little money. There's a way out of every situation, however bad, isn't there?" my mother said. But her voice sounded helpless. My mother was really compassionate. She was always anxious about me, her only son, about my future. How nice it would be if my father, who worked at an ironworks, really came home with some money in his pocket as my mother was hoping! We always used to wait for my father to come home from work, but that day I felt an unaccountably greater longing to see him.

After sunset I went out and sat on the verandah and opened a book. The March night was chilly.

"Brother, mother's set the table for supper," Yong Ok called to me, sounding worried.

"I don't feel like eating. You eat your supper with mother."

"Mother wants you to come in quickly."

"I ate at Jong Ho's home."

"You're lying!"

"I'm telling the truth, Yong Ok."

"Brother, don't worry mother. Come in."

At that moment my mother opened the kitchen door



and came out, saying:

"My dear, let's go in and eat. You ought to study after your supper. Skipping an evening meal won't make the money for the fees come, will it?"

"Mother, honestly I've eaten."

"You're such a stubborn boy."

After my mother had uttered these words, sighing, Yong Ok, who was standing by her, chimed in:

"Brother, you really are strange. You tell me that when you're hungry and cold, what you read goes down well because then you feel refreshed. You really beat me, Brother."

My mother echoed my sister's words and said:

"It's impossible for you to take in well what you read when you're hungry and cold. Poverty is responsible for all this."

My mother uttered these words in a hoarse voice, barely able to hold back her tears.

"Oh, Mother! You're crying again," I said anxiously. Then with an air of indifference she said, "Then let's have supper together when Father gets back." With this, she went into the kitchen.

It was late when my father came home. He came back empty-handed even though he had tried to raise some money. The ironworks was going to pay salary arrears a few days later. My head reeled for a moment. It was really agonizing to think that I would be unable to pay my first fees at the high school by the fixed date. My soaring dream of learning was dashed at the start and vanished into thin air. Was my high aim of learning going to be shattered?



## **Student Employment**

The demands for the payment of school fees were insistent. But payment was delayed by some day after day, and was now ten days overdue. The school authorities threatened to expel any pupil who failed to pay the sum within a week, irrespective of their reasons. I was not the only one who was under threat. There were some 30 pupils in my class who were threatened.

Fortunately, my father brought some money he had been paid as his salary in arrears. My mother, too, obtained some money by selling bean curd. I heaved a sigh of relief. I was determined to go to university after finishing at high school first in my year in view of the hardships my father and mother had gone through on my account.

But I was unable to free myself from the menace of school charges of every description. To get money to pay the enormous sums I felt myself compelled to sell baked sweet potatoes or to do a part-time job.

Most of the poor pupils at high school, college and university in Seoul went out to work after school hours. Doing odd jobs was a widespread practice among pupils.

Student employment is also called the “arbeit front”. The types of selling done by high-school and college students were various in modes and goods and the conditions were miserable. I would always see “student vendors” who set out their wooden boards on the ground by way of stalls at the underground stations or in the alleys of the school quarters in the heart of the city.



They looked like aliens on the street, and they caught the eyes of people and excited their compassion.

Some university students sold tangerines, roast chestnuts and peanuts from pushcarts and there were high school pupils who would look out for customers among the passersby with their goods—Christmas and New Year's cards they had drawn themselves and rare kinds of postcards—spread out on a large sheet of paper.

Busy places such as the alley leading to the old Taesong School near Kwanghwamun Street, the area in front of the Education Club, bus stops, Chongno Street 2, the entrances to underground stations and the roads in front of the gates of Ewha Women's University and Songgyungwan University turn into busy markets with these students in the evening.

One evening when darkness was gathering, I was coming back from the home of Teacher Choe from whom I had borrowed a reference book. I wanted to see how things were going with the student vendors. So, I went to the area in front of the underground station in Chongno Ward. There I saw Jong Ho among the high school pupils who were selling goods to earn money to pay their school fees. He was standing there among the vendors with baked sweet potatoes on a tray, anxious to draw customers!

This pitiful sight made my heart ache. His elder sister had gone to West Germany as a hospital nurse, and now he was living just with his mother and going to high school. So, he had to support his household by selling. What a pity it is, I thought, that such a brilliant student who is well-known for his clear head should waste his time selling goods when he ought to be



reading books. I felt greatly saddened at this thought. Seeing myself sharing his fate, I was terribly dejected.

I caught sight of the high school mathematics book lying by Jong Ho's sales board. I admired him for his passion for studying by learning every minute while selling. He pored over the mathematics book when he had no customer. He would blink his eyes, probably to memorise something and fix some theory in his mind.

Watching him read the book by making the most of every second, I felt an urge to help him sell the sweet potatoes. After all, was I not in the same circumstances as he so that I should have to become a seller sooner or later?

When I approached him and called his name, Jong Ho was confused and embarrassed and began to explain himself.

"Yong Son, I couldn't help it. If I didn't sell baked sweet potatoes I couldn't afford.... Don't criticize me."

"What a boy! Why criticize you? In our society young people have to pay their way through school. Don't say that sort of thing; let's sell the sweet potatoes together. I think I shall have to sell goods one day, just as you're doing now."

I stood by his side and helped him sell sweet potatoes.

"Here are baked sweet potatoes, buy these baked sweet potatoes! Tasty and cheap baked sweet potatoes! Sweet potatoes from Cheju Island, first-rate sweet potatoes!" I called out to the passersby, holding a baked sweet potato in my hand. People gathered in front of us. Our sweet potatoes sold quickly. Dusk fell and we left the place. Together with Jong Ho, I was passing Kwanghwamun Street when my eyes caught sight of a covered waggon in a fairly quiet background. On the



side of the waggon was a strange inscription, "Drink a cupful when you've problems and two when you're happy". Under it was another line which read, "Cheap drinks going with warm snacks—Chongno Covered Waggon KB". The words scrawled freely with a brush were so strange that the waggon stood out. I found out later that it was a "students' covered waggon". It was run by college students after class to earn money to pay their college fees and board. The covered waggons run by college students in the streets of Seoul caught the eyes of people, being a strange phenomenon.

Out of curiosity I looked into the waggon. There were students in it, one of whom was wearing strong glasses. I saw their swollen hands as they were clumsily preparing snacks to serve to their customers with drinks. This was what I saw. True, we presented a pitiful sight as we were carrying a tray for baked sweet potatoes, but they, college students, were still more miserable. To attract the attention of customers who wanted cheap drinks, they played an old gramophone which was jingling out some doleful music. In one covered waggon a girl university student was singing a cheap song in order to draw more people.

*The sky is high and blue,  
But whither has my hope gone?  
Pitiable, pitiable is my fate,  
The blasted hope in my window.*

*Tears of sorrow flow down drop by drop  
Wetting my heart.*

The song of the girl student was doleful. It seemed to



be a song composed by students to express their feelings. In any case, the song reflected in its words and melody the sorrow of us high school pupils and our elder brothers, the university students, who were having a hard time in the harsh struggle for existence. So, hearing the song, I felt my eyes becoming moist, too. I stood absentmindedly by the waggon for a while, fighting back my tears. The customers, too, put down their cups and wrapped themselves in their thoughts either painful, anxious or sorrowful.

When the singer wept, the customers wept. Then the students who were filling the cups and cooking some food to be served with the drinks rested their hands and joined them in singing, wiping away the tears that were streaming down their faces. The scene was reminiscent of a cheap bar or tavern in a back street.

The innocent-looking "proprietors" were university students, our elder brothers. They were also "cooks", though clumsy, wearing aprons over their trousers and sweating profusely. But they could not easily find favourable positions for their waggons. The good places were all taken by covered waggons owned by other people, and so they were usually pushed out to discouraging spots like the suburban bus stops.

It could be said in fact that the proprietors of these covered waggons were well off. These waggons had been set up by students who had funds. The students who had no money had to do worse jobs. The odd jobs they had to do were various—rearranging books in libraries, mowing lawns, cleaning restaurants, working as clerks in department stores, and what not. At one restaurant in Hannam-dong girl university students worked as waitresses, wearing their names on their



chests. There were girl students who worked as teachers at backstreet kindergartens after school. Kwak Jin Ju, a third-year student at the Konguk University was one of them. Girl university students in the suburbs or in the outlying areas came to Seoul after class and did the tiring job of "temporary bus conductress" until late at night, while strong boy students worked as porters who would carry loads on A-frames.

The selling and other kinds of work taken up without exception by poor students were really hard, tiring and miserable. They were tired out after using up all their energies in the drudgeries they hastened to do after class. As a result, the next day these pale-faced students would fall asleep and even snore in the corners of the classrooms from the first hour of lessons. Whenever I saw some of my classmates with their heads down on their desks during lessons, I was touched with compassion for them. They were so handsome and so bright.

Jong Ho always looked tired. He would often complain that he could not see letters and that he could not hear voices. There was even a pupil who fainted from fatigue and undernourishment during a lesson, and this caused a commotion. I heard that more and more pupils would give up or absent themselves from school when they moved up to the third year.

I felt heavy clouds were hanging low over the road ahead of me. How could I ever finish high school and go on to university when studying was so difficult. With this thought, everything went black before my eyes. Worries, a heavy heart, despair and nightmares gripped my whole body and soul.



## **The Last Lesson**

Difficult days and months of study went by in heavy sorrow and weariness. School terms and years passed. Three years flew by quickly amid daily anxiety about school fees, including stupendous sums for various charges and education association membership fees in addition to tuition fees and charges for textbooks. Now it was nearly time for me to leave school.

The school was stuck deep in the mud of money extortion and graft. Teacher Choe, who was in charge of our class, strongly insisted that such absurd and evil practices be dropped so that the school might return to its original course and defend integrity, honesty, justice and conscientiousness. He had a good reason for doing so. Unable to stand the pressure of school fees, many pupils in his class dropped out one after another. When we moved up to the third year, the 90-member class had dwindled to 35.

The heavy school fees overshadowed the pain ahead of Jong Ho, who paid the charges from his hard-won earnings from selling baked sweet potatoes and laundry work done by his mother, only to be pressed by further demands for payment of money under different names. I, too, found it hard to continue my schooling due to a drop in my father's earnings at the ironworks, having for two years paid such enormous sums in fees somehow or other with money stained with my family's tears and blood.

Jong Ho told the teacher in charge more than once that he intended to give up school. But the teacher



would persuade him to put up with the difficulties. After finishing a history lesson one day, Teacher Choe said:

"It is easy to drop out of school, but it is hard to get a place there. You pupils should stop thinking of leaving school on account of some difficulties in paying the school fees; you should talk seriously to your parents and then finish the course.

"It really pains me that, as the teacher in charge, I'm unable to help the pupils who have to leave school early."

His words were full of sympathy. We were grateful for his deep concern about the plight of us miserable pupils. He abhorred the rotten atmosphere at the school in which all the brilliant pupils had to leave school early to go to work and fools were placed high in their year on the strength of their money.

This honest attitude of Teacher Choe exasperated the school authorities and the Ministry of Education. One day he gave a lecture during a history lesson on the incident of the emissaries who were sent to the Hague by the government of the Li dynasty. He told us the true historical facts that, before disembowelling himself, Li Jun discarded his worship of the United States and passionately advocated the idea of independence and sovereignty. Then a pupil named Chang Sol, who was son of a company director, and a spy from his boyhood, reported the matter to the intelligence head planted at the school, telling him that Teacher Choe had spoken ill of the United States and praised the idea of independence and sovereignty. After that the teacher was placed under surveillance by the wicked headmaster and the secret intelligence agent.

The school authorities were unable to expel Teacher



Choe because he was popular with his pupils, so they brought pressure to bear upon him in various ways on the pretext that he had an ideologically improper inclination. The teacher did not want to be an intellectual slave who would continue to teach by yielding to this injustice and iniquity, so he decided to quit the school.

Teacher Choe was somewhat excited one day when he appeared in the classroom. After looking round at the dear faces of the boys he was in charge of, he opened his mouth:

"I have spent over two years under the same roof with you pupils. I tried hard to teach you truth from this platform, according to the dictates of my conscience. If the truth I have instilled in you continues to blossom in your minds, I shall be happy. The worth of the truth kept in your minds is the very worth and pride of us teachers. It is a sin for a teacher to plant a falsehood in the minds of his pupils instead of teaching them truth. Truth and falsehood are diametrically opposed. In particular, it is the lifeblood and *raison d'être* of a history teacher who teaches the history of the nation not to tell a lie and to speak the truth. I cannot teach you a falsehood. There are so many truths that must be brought to light in the history of our nation. There are questions that must be answered in the ties between the United States and Japan as they relate to our country, but the truth of this matter still remains distorted. I cannot for the life of me teach you, the masters of the future, distorted facts, describing them as truths. I would rather quit my teaching post than live as a man who shuns the truth and commits perjury."

His voice was trembling with excitement. I had never



seen him before with his face so flushed. His words sounded like the last declaration of a teacher leaving his post. His tone was bitter but resolute. He went on in a strong voice:

"My boys, history has always been on the side of truth. Truth will win. I would like you to follow in the footsteps of the sons of April who died shedding their blood in the cause of social justice and a new political system.

"The blood shed by our elder brothers on the pavements of the streets on that day of April 19 is still coursing through our veins. They dedicated their lives to the cause of truth and justice and shed their blood and died as the protectors of liberty. We cannot deceive ourselves and give in to injustice and must wait until the seed sown that April grows into a tree and gives out fragrance of liberty and bears the fruit of truth in abundance.

"In this hour of my last lesson today I have something to say to you for the last time. Let us meet again on the hill of liberty and then embrace each other warmly and erect our tower of truth! This is what I wanted to say to you."

Once more he looked round at us, his pupils, and, saluting us with his eyes, left the classroom without haste.

"Teacher! Teacher!" the pupils called after him, springing to their feet and following him out into the corridor.

I ran up to the teacher who was looking back and nodding to us in silence. This was the last time we would see the upright history teacher who had been in charge of our class, the teacher dear to us who had



always been sympathetic towards the poor pupils and was unyielding as far as truth was concerned.

When the teacher turned the corner of the corridor, some plain-clothes policemen seized him and walked him off. Our teacher did not appear at school the next day, nor the day after.

What offence is he guilty of, the teacher who is honest, faithful and conscientious? I asked myself, but could not find the answer however hard I thought. Sitting at their desks, the pupils would shout, with their fists clenched:

"Is it an offence to be conscientious?"

"Is justice punishable?"

"Let's go and get our teacher!"

Their indignation rose in protest. Their patience seemed to be exhausted. Looking round at my classmates, I said:

"It seems there's a spy in our class, a stool pigeon."

I turned my eyes unwittingly on Chang Sol who was sitting at a desk by the window, chewing Canadian gum. Then, as if by agreement, all the pupils stared fiercely at his beefy face. Under the menacing stare of his classmates, the fellow looked about him with scared eyes and skulked away, squealing, "What's going on?"

I came forward to represent the unanimous will of my classmates. Together with Jong Ho, I went to the headmaster's office with the simple thought that we must get our teacher back.

With a scowl, the headmaster asked us what we wanted.

"Where has our teacher gone?" I asked.

"And why do you want to know?"

"He has gone without finishing his history lesson and



the pupils are waiting for him."

"You children are so inquisitive! Teacher Choe is a recalcitrant. He won't be back. Go and ask for him at the police station."

Having discovered nothing more than that Teacher Choe had been dragged away to the police station, we left the headmaster's office, slamming the door behind us.

After that, I found myself under the official displeasure of the school authorities as an "undesirable pupil". The instruction department threatened to kick me out of school immediately when I failed to pay the official charges on time, whereas they allowed other pupils to pay the next day.

My days of torment at the high school, where acts of profiteering, injustice and irregularity were rampant, flew by. Jong Ho opted for self-tuition and gave up school after studying despite the difficulties that were due to the poor wages of his mother, a widow. He made up his mind to sit for the leaving examination by studying the teaching materials of the teachers which he would buy and the notebooks he would borrow from his friends.

I felt great anguish at being unable to help Jong Ho, who could be a prominent inventor if he could study without any cares. My circumstances were no better than his. The ironworks where my father worked would often suspend operations due to financial difficulties, and then it went totally bankrupt. So, my father became jobless overnight. This happened a few months before I was to leave high school. I found myself in a real fix. My family made desperate efforts to acquire money to cover my school fees. My mother made and sold bean curd



until her hands became chapped, but her earnings were not much to speak of. My younger sister, who was still a slip of a girl, got a job as a cleaner at the S Hospital, but received no pay to start with.

Thus, before me lay a steep uphill path, as had been the case with Jong Ho. I had to work my way through school. I had to choose the path of a student worker because it was not scholastic achievement but money that enabled a student to obtain a diploma. Together with Jong Ho, I sold baked sweet potatoes and often carried loads on an A-frame to earn money. Spending days of pain in this way, the two of us mastered the substance of all the high school subjects by studying by ourselves for a few months. At last, we came up for the leaving examination. Although the school authorities hated us, they placed us at the top of the year because we excelled in the examination. This was how my difficult days at the high school came to an end.

After leaving school came anxiety and anguish. Should I go out into the world without going to university because I had no money? But I resolved to go to university at all costs.

## **The Will of My Former Fellow Pupil**

A university is a place where young intellectuals nurturing great ambitions gather. The greatest dream of students who pursue learning is to go to university. The earnest desire of their parents is also to give them a university education.

I was in no position to go to university, but with the intention of working my way through the university, I



applied to sit the entrance examination. To enter the humanics department of the K University, I handed in an application form and the OMR card of a candidate and paid 2,800 *won* in examination fees to the education office in Chongno Ward in Seoul, and sat the examination.

The subjects of the examination were varied—national language, industry, national history, national ethics, mathematics, English, society, world history, national physical and natural geography, physics, chemistry, and so on. To my surprise, I got the best marks in all the subjects, and was admitted to the political and diplomatic department of the K University with 350 marks.

I devoted myself wholly to my studies while working, carrying loads on a hand-drawn cart. In the ability tests of freshmen conducted by the professors, too, I towered above my fellow students attracting the attention of the professors. As I learned later, the professors were loud in praising me for my outstanding ability and unusually clear head. Even my fellow students in my class came to me to ask questions and win my friendship.

One day soon after entering the university, we, the freshmen, were watching an athletics meeting of the senior students on the campus after lectures when two boy students and a pretty girl student approached me and spoke to me. Though fellow students in the same class, I had not yet had any close contacts with them. They were Kang Sun Ho, the son of the keeper of a small store, Pak Il Su, a real estate agent's son, and Sun I, a university professor's daughter.

"Yong Son, we know your name. The three of us came from the Chongno High School. This is a footballer called Pak Il Su," Kang Sun Ho, who lived in Songdong Ward, introduced them in a friendly manner. Then Pak Il



Su greeted me affably with a nod. I returned his greeting.

"And this young lady, Sun I here, dressed gracefully in white like a swan on a lake has appeared on the campus as a star. She is the talk of male society for her simple and modest character and her strong sense of justice. Her father is an authoritative doctor and professor of political science at our university. He is Professor Cho Un Song."

When Kang Sun Ho the daring joker introduced Sun I she greeted me by politely lowering her head with her face colouring.

"I am Sun I. I have heard about you, Yong Son, from my father. I hope you will kindly guide and help me in the future," she said affectionately in a voice as clear and ringing as a silver bell. They were all good-natured people who could be my dear friends ready to share pain and anguish as fellow students.

Meanwhile, there were impudent sons of privileged families in the other departments, like Chang Sol, the son of the president of a civil engineering company and a director of the Sinhung Foundation.

Our days as freshmen at the university flowed on in hope and friendship. Sometimes we were short of money for paying tuition fees, and at other times we felt sad with a gloomy future ahead of us. One such day I received unexpected news and nearly fainted. It was that my classmate at high school Jong Ho had committed suicide. I rushed to his house and found his mother wailing over the body of her dead son.

"Jong Ho my dear! What shall I do now that you have gone before me? Ah, me!"

Seeing the stiff body of Jong Ho, I fell to my knees and wept.







"Jong Ho! Jong Ho!..." I called, but there was no answer.

He had been so dear to me, his eyes which had been afire with righteous indignation, his lips which had cried for justice and truth, his face which had been aglow with enthusiasm for learning and radiating with intellect. Now my heart cried out for him.

"Why have you killed yourself, Jong Ho? If you couldn't carry on to university, what of it?"

I tore at my breast. I felt pity that such a clear head as his was lost. His friends had always extolled him as a talented student and cared for him. After finishing high school despite the adversity, he should have gone to work. But he was so thirsty for learning that he went in for the university admission examination. While I went in for the humanities department at the university, he chose to apply to the natural science department. In the entrance examination for the T University, he distinguished himself by gaining surprisingly good marks and got through it a few places from the top. From the day when he received the news of his success in the examination, he began to worry. His days passed in anguish. The enormous fees for admission and registration were beyond his reach. The admission fee payable by the new natural science students at the university was as much as 88,000 *won*. The tuition fees levied on the natural science students during their four years at university were 6,282,000 *won* in all, and so how could Jong Ho ever think of attending university by relying on the purse of his widowed mother?

As we were walking side by side one day, Jong Ho had told me:

"Yong Son, I cannot go to university whatever hap-



pens. I have to pay the admission and registration fees at once so that I may at least sit at a desk at the university. Oh, I'm dying to go to university. I really am yearning to sit at a desk at the university. To stock my mind with knowledge and race ahead in the van of modern science."

He uttered these words in a tone of desperation and gave a long sigh. Hearing his tormented voice, I felt a pain in my heart at being powerless to help him. My parents had, with difficulty, obtained a loan to pay my admission and registration fees.

"Jong Ho, you should go on with your education at all costs. Your talent shouldn't be wasted."

His head dropped and he wept. His sorrowful tears pained my heart. I wept, sharing his sorrow. Although he had passed the entrance examination for the university, he was unable to get his name on the list of new students. The fact was he was not qualified to be a university student because he had failed to pay the admission and registration fees.

At the end of his tether, he decided he would study by purchasing textbooks from his former schoolmates and teaching materials from the professors. But his self-tuition could last no more than one or two months. It was possible to pursue one's studies by reading teaching materials only when one had enough to eat at home. His mother's earnings were meagre and so he was tormented by hunger, and they could not afford to buy briquets to heat their small room even in the cold weather.

What, then to do? My mother is weeping every day, driven to despair because of me, so he thought to himself. Barred from further education and faced with gloomy prospects for the future, he sank still deeper into the pit of agony and despair. He became silent and



stopped joking, something which he had been given to. He was now standing on the final cliff of life, with a dizzy abyss of death lying below his feet. He resented and cursed the world. He placed an advertisement in a newspaper seeking a position as a private tutor. But all his appeals and entreaties fell on deaf ears, the world was icy-cold. Deep in perplexity and anguish, grief and despair, he made up his mind to die in protest against the world, and took poison.

Discovering the gist of the painful circumstances of his death, I picked up the will he had left behind. The will had traces of the mental pain he had experienced throughout the night he had written it and the sheet of paper was stained with tears. As I read it, my tears fell and moistened the marks of the tears left by Jong Ho. His will read:

"I wanted to study. I wanted to sit by the window at the university. But I could not pass through the gate, because of money....

"I want to live, I want to live for many years with my widowed mother. I want to live, but I cannot. I would rather give up everything and leave this world than live in misery.

"I accuse this accursed world with my death, the death of a young intellectual...."

Then he had written a few lines to his mother.

"Mother! Mother, you have gone through so much hardship to give me an education! Forgive me my hardhearted resolve to part with this world, leaving you alone. I wanted to go and live with you in Mokpo, our hometown where Father used to live, after my graduation from university. I hoped I would enter the service of a shipping company and allow you to live in joy to



your heart's content after your hard life.

"But all my dreams have been dashed. I am too well aware that I, this son of yours, am making you weep, sigh and heavy-hearted. So, if I leave you.... It is a terrible thing but forgive me.

"Please don't be angry, don't cry, because I, this thankless son, have gone and left you Mother alone at home .... After I die and become a spirit, I hope to serve you well. Mother, Mother! My Mother whom I would fondly call mother once more for the last time".

When I had finished reading, my hands trembled and the sheet of paper which carried the last words of Jong Ho fell helplessly. Taking Jong Ho by his still hand, I wept.

"Jong Ho, open your eyes! Why are you dead? With so many unfulfilled desires and so many dreams ahead of you, how can you go away like this! Jong Ho, Jong Ho!"

I cried bitterly. However long I might have cried, I could not comfort the soul of Jong Ho who had departed this world with regret. Comforting his mother, who was lying in distraction in the room, I sat thinking all night through.

"The tragic fate of Jong Ho. It's not suicide but a case of murder in which the world forced him to die. Murder!"

As I was wiping away my tears of sorrow, resentment against this world dug into my heart. So I was bereft of my bosom friend. The wound caused by the loss ached for a long time. This tragedy, which took place when I was rejoicing over my admission to university and fostering my dreams, instilled a bitter determination in my mind. This determination hardened my will and boosted my strength in my pursuit of learning.

I set my jaw in a resolve not to imitate the fate of Jong Ho.



## **2. Is a Man a Commodity?**

Is it that human beings are rags scattered by the roadside or pebbles lying on the seashore? And this in spite of the fact that the ideals put up in the world are products of human thought and the Earth's abundant riches have been created through human endeavours?

Human beings on sale in the human traffic market. Human beings! Is a man a commodity in south Korea?

### **Weights and the Prices of Human Bodies**

A dark shadow of tragedy began to creep into our home. After my father had lost his job due to the ironworks going bankrupt, our family of four passed every day in dejection and anguish. My father ran about eagerly looking for a job. He made great efforts to provide me, his only son, with higher education and to meet the earnest needs of his poor worker family. "Although I'm growing old, I'm still sturdy and strong. So, I wonder if I might be taken on as a workhand somewhere." This was the thought and desire present at all times in his mind.

With heavy feet my father trod along the streets of Seoul knocking at the door of one labour exchange after



another. He wandered endlessly. Every day he walked the streets in search of employment, but returned home with nothing. Seeing my poor father puffing at his pipe, sighing heavily, in the room, I would feel the urge surging through my whole body to give up university immediately and go out to work. But each time I would abandon the idea, feeling a lump in my throat at the thought of the desperate efforts my parents had made and their sacrifices to send me to school.

Unable to find employment in Seoul, my father left for a coal mine where, it was said, the work was dangerous but paid well. Through a friend he got a place in a mining company which was operating in the area of Mt. Taebaek. He decided to work there for a while.

I could not sit simply reading books. I had to earn some money at least to pay my university expenses until my father sent me money, and to help my mother, who was worried about feeding the family. When my father was at home, I would go out to carry loads on an A-frame once in a while after school, but more often than not the takings were negligible.

With the object of finding a night job, I studied the positions vacant columns in the newspapers and frequently called at the labour exchanges. One day in October I saw an advertisement in the positions vacant column saying that the Yonggwang Metal Company was looking for workers, and immediately hurried to the company building. They were employing full-time workers as well as part-time workers who were supposed to work four hours a day.

"If I work four hours a day, I can probably earn money and still attend lectures," I thought to myself.

My "hope" was enormous. The wages specified in



the advertisement were more than twice as much as those earned by A-frame carriers. When I arrived, there was already a large crowd of job hunters at the place. There were countless applicants for full-time work, and those seeking part-time jobs were also numerous. There were 275 people applying for the part-time jobs whereas only 30 were needed. In other words, the chances of getting a job were one in ten.

It was a close contest in which one had to beat nine others. The decisive factor for success in this hard contest was physical strength. Brains and intelligence were irrelevant in the competition for positions in a metal company where workers were supposed to deal with molten iron. Physical strength was the only standard for picking workers because they were to beat molten iron and handle iron ingots. Strength was the key to victory over others.

The weight deciding success or failure in the test was a 70-kilogramme box. The candidates had to run with this box on their back to a post at a distance of 80 metres, and then return. How fast and how agilely they ran up to the post and back would decide the issue. This was truly a human traffic market where human beings were bought and sold like commodities with their value judged by weights.

The heavy box and the post at a distance of 80 metres were not simply a means or marks for measurement; they were weights to measure the labour power of men and numerical yardsticks to assess its price. Watching the scene, I remembered the fact that human beings throughout history have been handled as commodities on the human market. When the human market is mentioned, people will often recall the old history







book which said that in ancient Rome and Babylonia human beings were sold as "speaking commodities". The "slave markets" which were common phenomena in old America and Europe are found in Seoul to the amazement of people today.

The candidates stood in a long line. A labour inspector and an official appeared and handed out numbered tickets to the people huddled up in the yard like piles of unsold goods. I was No.98.

People were called by number instead of by name. They went in for the test in numerical order. They sweated profusely to get a job at all costs. The scene was impressed indelibly on my memory. A jobless man in his fifties with a white towel around his neck came up for the test. At first glance he was a solidly-built man and looked very strong.

He lifted the box to his shoulder without effort and ran short distance ahead at a fast speed. But then he halted and could not walk a step forward; it was as if somebody was holding him back by his ankles. Large drops of perspirations trickled down his pale face. His lips, now dark blue, quivered convulsively and his eyes began to look like lead. Finally, he let go of the box and fell to the ground. But he wriggled his body because in his subconscious he realized that he had to get to the goal and come back with the box. People rushed up to him and tried to help him get up, when the labour inspector yelled out, "Let him alone!" What he meant was that the man should be left alone even if he died.

I saw sweat standing in the deep furrows across the brow of the man, who looked much older than his true age. He tried to rise to his feet with the box on his shoulder, but fell down again even before he could move



a step. Seeing that he was unable to stand any more, the inspector shook his head and shouted, "Next one." Looking at the pitiable man lying on the ground, I saw my father's face.

While engrossed in this depressing thought, I heard inspector's voice calling my number, 98. So, I stepped forward for the test, casting aside all other thoughts. The heavy box was now going to assess the value of a man that was "I". I lifted the box by a superhuman effort and moved forward. I reached the post by using all my strength, and now I had to run back. Looking ahead, I felt as if the distance I had to cover was a thousand miles. I ran for all I was worth and nearly reached my goal. But alas! A few steps before the post, my legs gave way and I sank down. After a short time, I heard the hateful voice of the labour inspector spitting out, "No. 98 rejected!" Instantly I sprang to my feet. "Rejected". For me this declaration was a shock. I had fallen two metres short of the goal. So I was eliminated from a competition of nine to one. My hope of working my way through university was dashed by a 70-kilogramme weight. The happenings at the labour scene were murderous.

## **"Street No. 0 of Hell"**

I wandered in search of a job, but in vain. I felt a desire to go and see my father, who had left for a coal mine at the foot of Mt. Taebaek. We had received no word from him since his departure to go and earn money to cover my university expenses. Then, after two months, he sent some money home by post so that I could pay several



months' university fees.

When the university broke up for the winter, I left for the coal mine to see my father. It was morning when I arrived at the mining village in Changsong, a town in Samchok County, Kangwon Province, where my father was employed as a labourer. I went to the miners' hostel and asked for my father. I was told that he had been ill with a bad hip for several days, but that though still unwell, he had gone into the pit at dawn. Hearing of his illness, I felt uneasy and was seized by an ominous premonition.

The morning in the coal-mining village was desolate. After I had been in the hostel for a while, a middle-aged woman entered hastily and asked the people there if the workers who had gone into the pit the previous evening were not out yet. When she heard that they had not come out, she went quickly outside. The woman appeared to be a coal miner's wife. I heard her talking to another woman in the yard.

"Has your black man come back?"

"No, not yet. And yours?"

"My black man is sleeping now."

This brief talk of the women surprised me. A "black man" apparently referred to a coal miner, and was a nickname used by them for their husbands. Some women even said "black boar" in referring to their mining husbands. These words were in common usage. I was flabbergasted to hear that coal miners were called "black boar", the reason being that they were black from coal dust. In my mind I rebuked the women for their rudeness. I thought to myself that the dreary atmosphere of the coal mine had ruined their gentle hearts and made them rough as to use such rude language.



But after all, the women were not to blame for calling their husbands "boar". The word had a hint of resentment and complaint against the society in which workers were treated like commodities. South Korea, where men are treated as commodities and, further, as beasts, was truly a burial ground for human beings.

The first impression of the coal mine I received at the hostel was dreadful. With an indescribably heavy heart I went to the pit. I wanted to see for myself the stall where my father was working. If I waited until he came out of the pit, it would take half a day. A coal miner who was close acquaintance of my father promised to take me secretly into the pit.

When the siren blew at seven o'clock in the morning, coal miners poured out into the street with lunch boxes hanging at their waists and streamed towards the pit. Wearing old, wornout work clothes I slipped into the stream. From behind the coal miners I could hear the sad voices of their wives and children who were seeing them off. Every word was a prayer for the safety of their husbands and fathers. Probably it was a tradition peculiar to coal-mining areas that miners should be sent off to their work with a smile so that they might return home without mishap; so a faint, sad smile was floating on the faces of their wives and children. It was a common occurrence that men who were strong and sprightly in the morning would be carried up to the surface dead in the evening. So, in this area of horrible disaster, the smiles of their families had a special meaning.

A journalist wrote after making an inspection of a coal-mining village that the colliers were "lives one second before." This is a very poignant expression. It means that mine workers will be breathing men one



second before but dead a second later. How accurate this expression is!

The mouth of the pit was dark and appeared as though it would swallow people. It was awaiting the coal miners, agape. When I reached the entrance, cold shivers ran down my spine. We entered the pit in mine car. Going down a shaft, we came to a level. From the level we crawled into a narrow tunnel like a mole's burrow. The low seam was about 60 centimetres high, and so the miners had to work the coal seam with a pick, lying on their back. There was no ventilation in the mole's burrow. It was suffocating and smelled unutterably foul. Moreover, the temperature stood at around 30 degrees C. So the pit face was practically a hell. The sweating faces of workmen smeared with coal dust reminded me of "boars". Can there be such a ghastly place to work in the world? I thought to myself. After working 12-14 hours a day in the hellish pit, the colliers did not have enough strength left to crawl out of the mole's burrow and reach ground level. They would be so exhausted that even when they heard shouts telling them there would be a gas explosion and that the timber posts were going to collapse, they could not move.

How good it would be if there were no accidents! Fatalities and accidents occurring one after another made the mine a death pit, and the wails of the victims' families were heard every day, I was told.

I could not discover where my father was working. I had to wait until the change of shifts. I blankly watched the miners at work. A miner in his fifties who was working close to me seemed to think that I, too, was a coal miner. He said to me:

"You seem young, less than 20. Why on earth are you



working here in this infernal hole of all places?"

I just nodded to him in gratitude.

"Look here, young man. Leave this place at once. If you stay here, you'll be buried alive under coal. As for me, I've got nothing else to do except stick at it because this coal pit is my lifeline to survival."

"Miners call this pit face 'Street No. O of Hell', I tell you."

"Street No. O of Hell?"

"Yes, exactly, Street No. O of Hell. The place where coal miners work is 'Street No. O of Hell'."

I repeated these horrible words in my mind, "Street No. O of Hell!"

It was not surprising that a coal face be called that. The murderous coal mine where people would come in tears and leave it dead was no less than "Street No. O of Hell".

The stifling foul air, the unbearably high temperature, the coal dust, the narrow mole's burrow where one could not stand upright, the arduous toil of working the coal seam with a pick, the fearful hole of death where timber posts collapsed at any moment—this was the reality and murderous scene of "Street No. O of Hell". This was why people would address the coal mine as "an infernal hole of death", "a deadly scene of drudgery", "a shambles", and "a hell of people haunted by death".

The mere thought of this sent shivers down my spine. I thought I was fortunate enough to have stayed alive in the pit even for a few hours. After a few excruciating hours in the pit I emerged on the surface, when I heard the terrible news that there had been a roof fall at a working face. The workmen who had gone into the pit



with my father in the early morning were the victims of a roof fall at a heading at the bottom of the mine, with over 40 killed and more than 20 seriously injured. They said the miners were "lives one second before", and here they were, buried under coal, people who had gone into the pit a few hours before. I felt a shudder running through my body.

"What has become of father?" I was seized with terrible uneasiness at the thought of my father, whose fate was as yet unknown. I asked the name of the miners who were reported buried alive at the bottom of the pit and whose bodies had not yet been recovered. Fortunately my father's name was not on the list of victims.

The mine entrance was in pandemonium, with the agonized cries of the victims' families. A woman wailed in distraction, sitting on the ground, barely able to move her heavy body being near the time of delivery.

"Oh, what shall I do now you've gone? How shall I bring up our child? Oh, oh, woe is me!"

Her heartrending cries added to the grief of all present. An eight-year-old girl who came running to the scene cried out, "Papa, Papa!" until she became hoarse, looking down into the dark mouth of the pit. "If papa is gone, what shall we live on? How are we going to feed my younger brother and sister? Tell me how, Papa!" Though only eight years old, the child was already aware of the heavy burden of being the support of the family. She rushed up to the mining company's inspector and begged in tears:

"Save my papa please. My papa is not dead. When he went to work this morning, he said he would surely come back home. Please find my papa quickly!"



The little girl's pathetic cries drew tears from many people. The bereaved families appealed to the management of the company to take measures for them to see the bodies of the dead. Nevertheless, the wicked officials of the company remained indifferent to such a dreadful disaster. Wails, cries and shouts turned the place into a scene of distress, a hell on earth. What was lost in the living hell was the value of man and what was gained was his dead body.

I had heaved a sigh of relief when I learned that my father's name was missing from the list of those killed. But he was among the seriously injured men. My heart missed a beat when I was told of this. They said that my father had been trapped under the loosened coal and had been injured in his waist, so that he was unable to move. He was taken to hospital and given first-aid treatment. My father, who had come to this far-off coal mine to earn money to cover my university fees, was lying before me in a serious condition, my dear father whom I had come to see.

"Father, I've come, your son Yong Son."

Hearing my voice, he pulled himself together and finally opened his eyes slightly. Casting a gentle eye on the face of his son, my father gave me a delighted look and then shut his eyes again. This was how he was disabled trying to earn money for my education.

People often call a labour site a "scene of murder" or a "hell of labour." This is no exaggeration nor lie. A worker who is sold like a commodity at a labour site, a murder scene, is destined to be crippled or killed. The workers of south Korea who are handled like goods are bled like the serfs of ancient society, and are abandoned like slag at the mine.



## **Placing My Last Hope in an A-Frame**

Father was the pillar and support of our family. So, his disability brought tears and affliction and despair to us all. We were short of money to pay for my father's medicine, not to mention my university fees. My father's illness grew worse over a few months. This was only natural as he had not had proper medical treatment. He would be disabled for life if his injury was not healed quickly, the doctors said. This sounded like a death sentence, and each time they heard it, my family were overwhelmed with fear. We would sit sighing heavily.

I made up my mind to give up university. The small amount of money my sister earned as a cleaner at a hospital and the money earned by my mother who worked self-sacrificingly were not enough even to meet our living expenses. Now being the head of the household, my mind wandered endlessly. I could not find a job, and had no money to start with to make money.

One day I went to the university with the intention of enlisting the aid of my classmates if possible. The first thing I saw upon passing through the gate of the university was the list of registration fee defaulters put up on the notice board. I ran my eyes down the list. But strangely enough my name, which I had expected to find at the top of the list, was missing. "Could it be that they have already struck me off the university register or that the instruction department has overlooked my name?" I thought I might well have been expelled, but nevertheless, I felt an aching void in my heart.



While I was immersed in wandering thoughts, Sun Ho and Il Su ran up to me joyfully.

"Yong Son, how come you've been away from lectures? Is your father getting worse?" they asked me. I answered them with a sad smile.

"Yong Son, Sun I has paid your registration fee."

"Sun I?"

"Professor Cho Un Song heard about you from his daughter and told her to pay your registration fee. Saying that you, bright student, must be worried about being unable to pay the registration fee, he suggested helping you." Pak Il Su, who was standing next to Sun Ho, chimed in:

"Sun I has heard that your father has been disabled, and she is awfully worried. She's proposed canvassing for donations to pay your father's medical charges by collecting some money from our classmates."

These words about my kindhearted friends moved me almost to tears. This cruel world was not lived in by wicked people alone. It was also fragrant with good people. I felt boundless gratitude to Sun I. Professor Cho Un Song's sympathetic feelings left an eternal lake of heartfelt gratitude in my heart.

Now that my registration fee was paid, I could stay at university for a while. Having no job for the moment, I presented myself at classes. I decided I would work as a porter after lectures. But the university squeezed an enormous amount of money out of the students, like milking cows. So, it became more difficult to continue to attend university. I had to find a job by all means. I went everywhere, in search of employment, but it was no use.

One day I said in the presence of my friends that I wished I could buy an A-frame carrier. The next day







Kang Sun Ho whose mother had opened a small store, led me by the hand to a place where A-frame porters were thronging. Sun Ho spoke to one of them:

"Sir, please sell us your A-frame carrier. The money here is all that I have. We're going to work our way through university."

The man was annoyed by how little he earned and so readily accepted the offer and handed over his A-frame carrier to us for 8,000 *won*.

Sun Ho said:

"The money has been earned by my mother, so don't worry about it. Make up the deficiency in your university fees by using this A-frame."

I felt a lump in my throat. "Thank you," I barely said, choked as I was by tears.

"This is all I can do for you. My mother is also worried because her small store is making a poor showing.

"Understand my good-will, and use this A-frame. You're intelligent and so you don't have to pore over your books all day long as others do."

"Sun Ho, I'll be sure to repay your kindness some day. I really am grateful to you!"

Holding back my tears with some difficulty, I threw the A-frame over shoulders. As I carried an A-frame for the first time on my shoulders on which previously I had carried only a satchel, I felt my heart fill with sorrow. Straight from there I went to the railway station and carried loads for money until late at night. I had had no lunch, and so my legs were weak and shaky while I carried heavy boxes on the A-frame. I was terribly hungry. My eyes kept drifting towards restaurants from which came wafting the smell of deep-fat fried food. But I resisted the temptation. My first day's earnings as



an A-frame porter were fairly good. There was enough money to buy some five or six bowls of noodles topped with seasoned green seaweed. I felt as if I were treading on air.

But the showing of a porter's part-time work was decided purely by chance. On a lucky day my earnings would be fairly good, but when I was out of luck, my business was a flop. Sitting in front of the station or by a bus stop all day long, I kept following the eyes of passersby carrying heavy luggage. I waited anxiously for them to beckon me. My precarious days as a young A-frame porter were passed in waiting all day, pinning my hopes on "If by chance...." The clients would usually prefer stout-looking middle-aged porters to small young student-porters like me. On many days I failed to earn a single penny.

When I had a small sum of money once in a while, I kept it in my pocket. Then when the money amounted to several hundred *won*, I went to a bank and deposited it a savings account. The bank clerk grumbled about my bothering him with such a small amount of money. I nevertheless endured everything and saved penny by penny. My mother was always hard up, and I felt the urge to give her the money I had earned. But I withstood it and continued to save money. I did so because I was burning with a desire to buy a hand-drawn cart to raise money for my father's medical treatment and my own education.

My work as a porter was a secret to my mother, sister Yong Ok and father. Endure it today so you can laugh tomorrow, was my thought. Because of this I did not take the A-frame home, but kept it at my friend's. One day I came home late at night and found my sister



sleeping huddled up by the old desk. My father was turning over in bed with a groan, and my mother was fast asleep, tired out. I walked up to my sister on tiptoe and sat down by her side. There was a sheet of paper by her pillow. I picked up the paper and looked at it with amazement. There was a large picture of an A-frame carrier on it! An A-frame, which I carry on my back all day long! Then has she seen my A-frame carrier and the sorry figure I cut weighed down under the heavy load? Then do my father and mother know?

I took another look at the sheet of paper. It bore the marks of tears. Probably she had shed tears because she felt sorry for this brother of hers. Her diary was left open on top of a book with an unfinished entry. Out of curiosity, I thumbed through the diary, reading it here and there. It read:

April 1

Surely something has happened to my brother. He refuses to take with him the lunch mother prepared for him. He comes home late at night.

What can be the matter? I wonder. I want to ask him about it, but I don't want to annoy him....

April 9

Today, too, brother came home with his satchel slung over his shoulder. It is clear that he has been expelled from university for failing to pay his fees. And why is he carrying his satchel across his shoulder? Does he want to relieve father and mother of their worries?

It seems that mother wants to ask him what the matter is with him, but keeps quiet for fear that she may get a blunt answer.



April 12

I have heard that a girl called Sun I in brother's class paid his university fees. How kind she is! I wish I could see this older girl. I wonder if there can be such warmhearted girl in the world. But I think it is all because my brother is a talented student.

I will earn money, too, so that father can be cured of his injury and to supplement the university fees of brother who is renowned throughout his university. What shall I do to make money? Brother is truly an excellent brother. He is the hope and pride of our family. Just seeing him fills my heart.

April 13

Today I saw brother go to his friend Sun Ho's home with his satchel on an A-frame which he was carrying on his back and leave it there. So, brother has been working as an A-frame porter! But he has said nothing about it. He is so hardhearted! How could he work as an A-frame porter and yet keep quiet about it? He has been carrying heavy loads, and so how much his shoulders must have hurt!

What is the use of money? I felt like rushing up to him and pounding on his chest with my fists, crying, but I pretended not to have seen him and turned back. Poor Brother! My dear Brother! Will the day come when the star of hope sheds its rays on him? Oh, how I long for that day!...

Having read thus far, my heart became full.

"So my secret is out!" I thought to myself.

But in any case, I appreciated my sister's consideration. Her diary conveyed to my heart the warmth of



Yong Ok's sympathetic feeling for me, her elder brother.

With determination I carried on with the job of A-frame porter. One day I was walking along a street with difficulty, carrying a heavy box wrapped up in a thin film of PVC on my A-frame, when suddenly it began to pour down with rain. But I could not shelter from the pouring rain, the load had to be taken to the station in a hurry. I was soaking wet. My face ran with rain. To add to it, sweat was pouring off me. It was difficult to tell whether it was rain or sweat that was streaming down my face.

All the pedestrians but me ran and got under the eaves of the houses, into stores and the nearby underground station to shelter from the rain. I walked on through the rain over the wide street loaded with my burden, a young A-frame porter. My appearance was a symbol of poverty and hard toil.

At that very moment I saw a girl student running up towards me. And what's all this? She put an umbrella up over me as I was faltering along under the weight of my heavy load. It was really a kind act. I thought I must know the warmhearted girl student and looked at her. To my surprise, it was Sun I herself, the girl who had paid my registration and tuition fees! I gave a start as if I had touched an electric wire. How could she possibly have recognized me in the wide, busy street and rushed up to me?

"Yong Son!" she said in a broken voice. Hearing her sympathetic voice, I answered her tender eyes with an affectionate nod. "Yong Son!" she said again in a soothing tone, "Must you work as an A-frame porter? My father has told me more than once that he will pay your university fees. Use the time you spend carrying loads for hire for reading books. Our family is not very



rich, but he said we can afford to look after you. Please don't carry the A-frame any more."

Her voice was trembling. She got herself soaked through while holding the umbrella over me.

"Thank you, Sun I. But I have to work as a porter. Father is ill and..."

"I've just been to your home. I gave your father some medicine my father had bought for him."

"Medicine?"

"Yes."

"Sun II" I could not go on, choked as I was with gratitude for her kindness. After a short while I said, "Sun I, you're wet through. Go quickly now, please."

The rain subsided and she ran off, her tear-filled eyes lowered. I wept in the recess of my heart.

A few days later, I bought a hand-drawn cart second hand with money from my hard-earned savings. I climbed, as it were, the ladder of poverty, moving up from the "rank of an A-frame carrier" to the "rank of a hand-drawn cart".

In the daytime I moved about forwarding various loads on my cart, and at night I studied. My thirst for learning was insatiable and my craving for schooling died down not for a single day.

But a man can live even if he does not study for a day, whereas our family could not live if I did not pull my hand-drawn cart even for a single day. This was the trouble and misery with our family. One day my cart, which I had left by the roadside, was hit by a US army truck and smashed to pieces.

Now that the cart my only hope was gone, what could I do to get money to live and study? I cursed the US army truck, pounding on my chest, but my voice sounded







hollow and vanished on the wind. This was the end of my uphill efforts to work my way through university, the steep road which I had been climbing step by step, carrying my hopes on the hand-drawn cart.

I wanted to find a job on a private tutor to a primary school pupil, but it was hopeless. University professors and teachers came forward as "special A-class extracurricular teachers" and were being rewarded for their tutoring. In this situation who would take on a university student like me as a tutor. In south Korea, a land of vanity and hypocrisy where titles speak louder than merits, a youngster like me without a title could have no chance of being taken on as an "extracurricular teacher".

## **A Life Fettered to Debts**

I think the saying "The poor get poorer" refers to our family. We could not afford to send our ailing father to hospital. So, he only went to see a doctor for medical advice, and the consultation fee was enormous. In addition, as I moved up to higher grades at university, the amount of various fees increased to a ridiculous extent.

Our debts multiplied and begot more debts, and now our liabilities amounted to an enormous sum. While south Korea was one of the world's greatest debtor nations, our home and my family were deeply in bondage to debts. Under the weight of the debts, our home, a wooden house, appeared to topple over. My father's condition grew worse, but we could do nothing for him.



The kind help from Sun I's family had its limits. Her father was a renowned professor, but recently he had been barred from giving as many lectures as before, for reasons of being a "dissident professor who causes unrest". This resulted in a drop in his income from lectures, and so his standard of living deteriorated. Nevertheless, he was always mindful of my university fees. In this world today where humane feelings all dried up like a withered old tree, his kindness was of immeasurable help to me and it called forth my deep gratitude.

It was my younger sister Yong Ok who was most painfully aware of our depressing household worries. It is said that the children of destitute families awake sooner to worldly cares and become sensible earlier than other children. Considering her age 16, Yong Ok was mentally precocious. The work of a hospital cleaner was filthy and hard. Doing the hard and dirty work for an insignificant amount of money, she had become markedly thinner. Her face had grown pale and she would often groan and talk in her sleep.

Watching Yong Ok, my mother's eyes became more anxious. One day my sister came home with expensive medicine for my father. "Where on earth has she got the money?" we, my mother and I, wondered, staring at her in blank astonishment. My sister explained herself with a forced smile, as if to excuse herself for her act:

"I bought the medicine with money I have saved little by little from my pay."

This was clearly a lie. I was sure that she, usually so honest and faithful, was telling a lie. This thought sent me trembling inside.

"The chemist's uncle said that this medicine is very



good for a bad hip. He said that father would get well soon."

As she smiled faintly, fingering the medicine, tears, which she tried to conceal from us, came into her eyes. I looked at her in a daze. I had the feeling that some misfortune had befallen her, and I could not calm my heart.

One day after that, I learned from some passing remarks made by Sun I that Yong Ok was visiting the blood bank.

"Oh, that's what it is!" I almost screamed to myself.

This was without doubt a diabolical world. How could they ever sweat and bleed a mere slip of a girl so cruelly? I could not check my burning resentment and sorrow. The only desire of my sister was to cure my father of his illness and to contribute to my university fees. For this my sister, still so young, threw herself without hesitation on the mercy of the heartless world.

The situation at our home went from bad to worse even after Yong Ok gave her sweat and blood and young soul to save it. At the end of her tether, she went one day to see an old man at an employment agency through the introduction of an older cleaner who worked with her.

"Please find me a position. My ailing father is getting worse and my elder brother is prevented from attending lectures at university regularly because we cannot afford his university fees. Please help me."

"Oh, what a good girl you are. And have you discussed the matter with father and mother?"

"Never mind, please. I'll do any kind of work to the best of my ability if it's paying."

"Well, it's true that a few days ago I was asked to find







a young maid to work at the house of the director of the company in Chongno Ward, but....”

“Maid?”

“Right. They offered 300,000 *won* in advance. One year is the term of service, they told me. Does it suit you at that?”

300,000 *won*! Yong Ok’s ears pricked up. A sum of 300,000 *won* would be enough to cure her father of his disease and to pay her brother’s university fees for a year.

She accepted the offer then and there without reckoning the pros and cons of it any longer.

This was how my sister left her low-paid job at the hospital and went to work as a maid at the house of the company director. My younger sister Yong Ok made this resolute decision for the sake of her bedridden father and me, her brother, who was carrying an A-frame for money to meet my university fees.

The day when Yong Ok put the 300,000 *won* she had received as an advance in her mother’s hand and made us farewell as she left for the house of the company director, all our family were drowned in tears. I felt as though I had received an electric shock and wept bitterly in the recess of my heart, I bit my lip hard so as not to let my sister see me crying, but I was unable to master my grief and in the end gave way to tears.

My mother sobbed ceaselessly in the kitchen, holding the trembling hands of Yong Ok tightly in hers.

“Yong Ok dear, listen to me. Return this money. We can get along without this money. Whatever happens a spider won’t weave its web on the mouth of a living man, will it? You can’t leave your mother. What a terrible thing! What a cruel world this is! Oh, oh...”



With this, my mother again shed tears of sorrow and despair.

"Mother, don't worry about me, please. I'll come back after working for a year at the director's house. I think that's what the old man at the employment agency has told them, too."

"Oh, don't, Yong Ok dear. Please listen to me."

"Yes, Mother, I must go. You must heal father with this money, and contribute to my brother's university fees, too. I mean what I say. Mother, please do what I say."

"Yong Ok!"

"Mother!"

Finally, Yong Ok threw herself into her mother's arms and sobbed. Standing transfixed by the door like a statue, I watched the scene, filled with rising disgust and grief for my own incompetence. Was I powerless to save my sister from the tragic fate of being sold off as a "slave of modern times" for 300,000 *won*? I cursed myself. I felt bitter against myself who, as a man, was incapable of driving away from my own home the demon in the shape of evil fate. I was unable to turn my beloved sister back, taking her by the hand as she was being sold away as a "maid slave" like a commodity to a rich family. It seemed to me that even heaven was indifferent and was sneering at me, a miserable man.

I could not bear to watch the scene any longer, so I left the house and lingered in the yard. Finally Yong Ok left, weeping sadly with a small bundle her mother had prepared for her in her hand. We went to see her off. She got on a bus beyond the Sejong Culture House and kept her eyes fixed on us, wiping the tears from her eyes. Although she was going to live in a house in Seoul not



far away, she was starting on a road of life which gave her no promise about when she would meet us again. The house of the J company director was located near the Changgyong Palace Grounds, but it seemed to me that my sister was going far away, over the horizon.

As the bus disappeared into the distance, the dear face of Yong Ok floated before my eyes.

## **Can the Poor and the Rich Live Together?**

Time passed. As someone has said, time is like a fleet steed, and time flew by like an arrow. Months passed after Yong Ok, my sister so pretty and so dear to me, left home. I missed her sorely. Although she had passed her childhood in destitution in a poor family occupying a shabby wooden house, she was well known in the neighbourhood and at her school for her good nature; she took after her kindhearted mother.

Separation from her daughter who was so lovely and gentle and filial caused her mother great pain and she was now ill, having suffered a nervous breakdown. She was always sorry that she had been unable to dress Yong Ok in decent clothes when she left. So, she was anxious to prepare and send at least a change of clothes to her daughter, and at last managed somehow to make one.

One day I went to see my sister with the cheap, new clothes made for her by her mother. My heart ached for my sister Yong Ok. She had been sold off like an article of trade, so to speak, to save her sick father, her debt-tormented family and her poor brother's dream. I felt an



unbearable yearning for her. Whenever I used to return home from school with heavy feet, she would run out to meet me cheerfully. Her image was printed on my mind at all times now. A thousand thoughts crowded upon my mind, producing all sorts of conjectures.

"I wonder how much Yong Ok has changed in her appearance. She may have been given new clothes because she is working at a billionaire's house. Or is she passing her days in tears as a waiting maid or a servant girl? If she is being ill-treated, she should be taken home," I thought with a heavy heart as I walked on.

When I came to the house of the company director, I was bewildered. The house was a three-storeyed building of Western style surrounded by high walls. At first glance it struck me as "a swelling den of vast ill-gotten wealth", just as a poet said. I pressed the bell at the gate, and told the guard who appeared of the compelling reason for my coming to see my sister. The kind man invited me in and told me to wait in the garden for a while.

The moment I stepped into the garden, I had the impression that I had entered a palace garden in fairyland. In the wide garden beautiful tropical plants were growing. Everything I saw was astonishing since it was the mansion of a newly-risen comprador capitalist who had become rich overnight by the special favour of those in power. I heard later that the outer and three inner gates were fitted with television devices to watch the movements of visitors. Everything those who entered the gardens or passed down the corridors did was watched through these television devices. Should an emergency arise making it necessary to shut down the house, the iron gates could be closed automatically at



the press of a button.

There were four watchdogs of different types and three pet dogs which had the free run of the house and were well clothed and fed by its master and mistress. In the outhouse was an aquarium where almost all the varieties of rare fish in the world were raised, they said. It was boasted that one rare goldfish was worth over 500,000 *won*. As for cars, there were six new models for private use.

This capitalist ranked among the ten richest men in Seoul, and nobody knew how much property he owned. He had a villa on the pleasure beach at Haeundae near Pusan and another on the coast off Inchon. Apart from his real estate in the countryside, he had six factories, counting large ones alone, in Yongdungpo, Inchon and other places.

Wherever his property was found, there were a large number of administrators, accountants and guards to look after it. To take his mansion near the Changgyong Palace Grounds for example, there were three gardeners to take care of the plants in the garden, two "servants attending on dogs" who had to feed and dress and please the animals, four kitchen-maids and cooks, three cleaning women, seven chauffeurs, five guards, two private tutors, a telephone operator, a hairdresser, a beauty expert, a masseur, and maidservants looking after two legitimate and nine illegitimate children. They were innumerable.

The capitalist lived at the height of luxury and debauchery. All the members of his family changed their clothes 30 times on average every day, it was said. So, how many people must there have been to take care of those clothes? Money could buy everything—men and



knowledge and government office. South Korea was a society where one could become a member of parliament and even President if only he had money.

The fascinating sight of the garden reminded me, in contrast, of my house, a wooden shack with low eaves, a sordid one-roomed hut with no more than eight *pyong* of floor space. All our family of four had to eat at every meal was two packs or so of noodles.

The house of the company director and my home represented the two extremes of the rich and the poor. While wealth begets greater wealth, poverty produces more abject poverty. In other words, while the rich become still richer, the poor become poorer.

As I looked at the house of the rich capitalist, I asked myself if it was right that such wealthy people rolling in luxury and paupers like our family should live together under the same canopy of the heavens. Can the poor and the rich live together? I was still unable to find a proper answer to this question. At any rate, I was dazed by the sight of such stunning wealth.

While I was looking around blankly, riveted to the spot like a statue, I caught sight of my sister Yong Ok attending a dog by the outhouse on the other side. She was now patting the dog, a Mexican variety called "Walt", on the back and now combing its blonde hair. It was obvious now that Yong Ok was a "maidservant" of the dog "Walt". Her task was to please the dog's "humour" so that it might spend its time most "joyously and delightfully" and feed it as best as she could to suit its "palate" before she put it in the arms of the company director's wife. In a word, Yong Ok was a maid waiting on a dog. Here was a human being subordinated to a beast. This was a case of human tragedy past endurance,



a case of the rich trampling mercilessly on the poor.

The thought that my beloved sister Yong Ok was being treated worse than a dog, her personality trodden under foot, made my blood boil. Watching the piteous scene from behind a tree in a corner of the garden, I burned with a desire to run up to her and, grabbing her hand, take her home at once. I moaned and groaned. But I clenched my teeth, shedding large tears. It was an agonizing moment.

A little later, informed by the guard, Yong Ok came running towards me. She approached me quietly, glancing about her for fear that she should be detected by the master's family. There is a saying that a poor man has consideration for another poor man. So, the guard must have listened to my request because he pitied my sister.

"Brother!" exclaimed Yong Ok tearfully the moment she saw me. She then took me by the hand and led me to a recess in the garden's back path. I was too choked with emotion to open my mouth. "Brother, what are you doing here? How is father? Has mother been well? Have we cleared our debts?" she fired questions at me in a tearful voice. But I was unable to speak.

"Brother, what's the matter? Has anything happened?"

We, my sister and I, stood looking at each other in tears under the wall surrounding the mansion. For a long time we said nothing. Yong Ok kept sobbing convulsively. Working as a maid she had become much thinner. As I looked at her pale face, tears of sorrow gushed from my eyes like a fountain.

I did not know how much time had passed, but after a good while Yong Ok opened her mouth:

"Brother, I seem to have worried you a lot. But there's



nothing to worry about. I'll try and work for a few more months.

"Brother, please don't worry. If all of you at home are well, I'm all right."

My sister was rather trying hard to console me, her elder. Her praiseworthy thought of sacrificing herself to relieve her parents of their anguish and lighten her brother's burden tormented me still more. I had many things to tell her and no end of questions to ask. But I could not open my tightly-shut mouth. My sister dashed her tears away and smiled in an effort to cheer my suffering heart. But her attempt affected me more keenly.

With trembling hands I held out to Yong Ok the bundle of clothes my mother had put in my arms.

"Here you are. Mother sewed them for you. A grown-up girl ought to have clothes to change into while you're living with someone else. Take them."

"Brother, I don't need them. They've given me a change of clothes here, if it is for appearance's sake. Take the clothes back home and see that they're remade so Mother can wear them."

At this moment I heard the barking of a dog. It seemed the dog was summoning its "servant". Yong Ok gave a start.

"Brother, I must go. Please come to see me again," she said in a broken voice.

"Go quick," saying this, I put the bundle of clothes in the hands of my sister, left the wall and strode off toward the gate.

Yong Ok went away at a run towards the outhouse, looking back over her shoulder with her face drenched in tears. That was the end of our meeting.



Later, my dear sister emigrated to Brazil. For a term of three years!... Leaving a tear-stained letter behind, she left for that far-off country to make money to cure her father's illness and pay the university fees of me, her brother.



### 3. The Land of Prison

The suffocating land knowing neither an azure sky nor a limpid river. Was there a moment when I was free from the chilly fetters which entwined my body? When will the warm sunshine of freedom light up the land of south Korea, a prison without bars for all its people?

#### “Ten Caution Diseases”

To the moneyless and powerless people, south Korea is a land of terror. In south Korea everyone excepting the privileged people who had gold and power in their hands is a “permanent prisoner”. This is so because anyone who should feel discontented or displeased in the least with the present unfair and choking social institutions is liable to be bound up in fetters of fascism.

Once I spent a whole day waiting for clients with my hand-drawn cart in an alley on Kwanghwamun Street, and in the evening went to the home of Jong Ho to borrow a book. There I saw plainclothesmen raiding a house right opposite Jong Ho’s. They questioned the middle-aged man of the house in a rude, threatening tone. I became curious and asked Jong Ho what the matter was. He said the police were calling an article written by the reporter of the newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo* into question and were going to arrest him. We, Jong



Ho and I, went close to the wall of the journalist's house and strained our ears.

One of the plainclothesmen threw a rolled sheet of newspaper at the journalist. The latter coloured up at this act of insult, but picked up the paper from the ground and ran his eyes over it. Suddenly a scornful smile appeared on his face.

"Aha, this article entitled 'Ten Caution Diseases' has gone against your grain, is that it?" he snapped out.

"That's right."

"I think the article is a fine piece of work, though."

"That's why it has caused a great sensation now, Sir Journalist."

"Are you going to insult me by speaking a sneering tone like that?"

"Insult? Hum. Sir Journalist, let's have a talk later, but you should come with us."

"To where?"

"To the police station."

"Why should I go?"

"Can't you guess why?" the policeman said roughly.

Passersby began to gather one after another. The newspaperman did not give in pliantly.

"You say you don't find the 'Ten Caution Diseases' to your liking, but I only wrote about facts as they were."

"Your Honour, who told you to write about facts as they were?"

"Are you going to tell the journalists to give false information instead of writing about the truth? It's the primary duty of the journalists to report facts honestly as they are, I tell you."

"Primary duty? Oh, look at this Sir Journalist."

The policeman was overbearing. But the newspaper-



man faced up to him defiantly.

"I reported truthfully the talks of people thronging in Chongno Street, and how come that doesn't suit your fancy? They represent the popular sentiments."

"Popular sentiments?" the policeman repeated his words and then snatched away the newspaper from his hand, which he read aloud:

"These days people should be cautious about everything. Nowadays ten caution diseases are prevailing."

Then he shouted almost threateningly, "Now, look. Are you going to say this isn't an attack against the government?"

"Isn't it the grim reality of this country where people cannot live without caution?" the journalist retorted with dignity.

"Shut up and come with us."

"Are you really trying to deprive the journalists of their pen?" the reporter rapped out angrily.

"That pen of yours should be broken to pieces."

"You'll have to account for your words, and for your act of trampling on the freedom of the press."

"Freedom of the press? What's the damned freedom? Hey, let's go. A cell is waiting for you."

The policemen pushed the journalist by force into the police van and went away.

The people present at the scene spoke their minds.

"As the journalist said, this is a society where people should live cautiously."

"They're hideous gangsters."

"They've arrested the newspaperman for writing about facts just as he saw and heard, and so there's no need to say that the lives of us people count for nothing."



“And it’s no less outrageous that they beat and arrest democratic figures indiscriminately for the reason that they aren’t to their liking.”

“Things have gone so far that they storm into churches and walk off the preaching fathers or bishops. Where on earth can you find a club law like this?”

They gave vent to their pent-up resentments against the fascist establishment. I could not suppress my indignation flaring up in my heart. I felt a desire to read the article written by the reporter I had seen just before and rummaged through the back numbers of the newspaper. In Jong Ho’s house I found the article with the heading “Ten Caution Diseases” which was not very long. I ran my eyes quickly through it. It read:

“Chongno is a busy street and so every alley on this street was bustling with people. Jobless persons in varied appearances were squatting there. Some of them were sitting, leaning against the legs of their A-frames and others were hailing customers to buy their antiques. There were many hand-drawn carters.

“Dusk was falling. An A-frame porter opened his mouth, ‘Nowadays one should be careful in everything. It’s not for nothing that the words three cautions are in vogue’. The implication was that of late ‘three cautions’ was a watchword of the populace for ‘personal peace and physical security’.

“‘Three cautions?’ asked another A-frame porter who was sitting beside him, smoking.

“‘Yes. It refers to the need to be careful about one’s person, one’s mouth and one’s ears.’

“As I understood it, the three cautions was a very interesting expression. Caution about one’s person meant to avoid meeting people as far as possible except



those needed for business's sake, caution about one's mouth—to refrain from speaking about anything whether one knows about it or not except when absolutely necessary, and caution about one's ears—to keep one's ears shut even when one is curious and impatient to hear. A middle-aged man looking like an intellectual who was selling antiques cut into the conversation.

“These days you need to be careful about five things instead of three, I tell you.”

“Careful about five things?”

“Sure! Because you should be careful about your eyes and your nose, too. I'll tell you what this caution about your eyes is. You had better shut your eyes as far as possible to the scenes enacted in and around the Blue House, the Capitol Building, the National Police Agency, and the Supreme Court however amusing or shocking they may be. This is what it means.”

“What, then, is the caution about one's nose?” a young man asked.

“Caution about one's nose means that it's wise never to smell the stink of rotten politics and foul odor of decay however powerfully they may impregnate the air in south Korea. This is essential to ensure the safety of one's life and keep one's person sound and unhurt.” the middle-aged man answered immediately.

“There was a burst of boisterous laughter among the people deriding the frenzied behaviours of the fascists. A man in thick-lensed spectacles put in a word, ‘So, I think it'll be proper to call them five cautions.’

“The middle-aged man said, shaking his head, ‘No. You must be careful of everything in south Korea and so you can give it any name accordingly. Now, I'll give a few more examples. You listen. There's the caution



about your legs because you must not walk about as you like; the caution about your arms because you must not swing your arms freely; and, further, the caution about your head because you must not see, hear and judge nor think arbitrarily; the caution about your lungs because you must not breathe in as much fresh air as you can even if the sky is clear and blue; the caution about your stomach because you must not say hungry but endure your hunger even when you are hungry; and....'

"Here the spectacled man interrupted him, 'So, south Korea is a land of caution and its people is living a life of caution, I think. Ha, ha,ha.'

"Everyone made a remark bitterly sarcastic against the fascist dictatorship which was trampling on the freedom and rights of man. There was no end of 'caution diseases' since people mentioned 'three cautions,' 'five cautions,' 'seven cautions,' 'ten cautions' and so on.

"The whole of south Korea is infected with ten caution diseases like typhus and cholera. In this suffocating human grave and ruins of human rights how on earth can human beings live peacefully even for a day?"

After reading the article I said to Jong Ho:

"It's well written. I'm so pleased."

"It's a fine satire."

The writing of the newspaperman was correct. In fact, this was a horrible land. People who were in bad with the police or fell under the watchful eyes of secret agents could not get off unhurt. In our neighbourhood, too, many people would disappear without traces overnight. This was why newspapers highlighted missing incidents everyday. A case of a man having been snatched off secretly tied with a cord during the night or a man carried off by surprise by intelligence men or



secret agents in an alley and finished off, and so I could go on.

This was well-nigh a daily occurrence. Scarcely a night passed without witnessing similar cases. This was why people would ask each other in the morning as if it were a password:

“Are you well through the night?”

This first greeting exchanged between people in the morning did not refer to their health conditions but to their physical safety—inquiring if they were not arrested and killed or crippled last night but passed the night safe and whole. This was really an absurd fact.

Secret agents were present everywhere, and so it was impossible to speak freely. Nobody could tell who was a secret agent. Secret agents were found even among friends and among parents and children. Everywhere—school, restaurant, park, and all places where people were breathing, the claws of secret agents were lurking like black shadows.

This explained the atmosphere of mutual distrust prevailing through the whole of society. Living under the watching eyes of secret agents, people could not help falling ill from “caution diseases” to be “careful about their person” at all times. They would lapse into the habit of guarding against and giving a wide berth to one another, and “a wall” would appear between them. This “wall” of distrust goes up higher with each passing day, not only between individuals but also between families. Seoul affords a good example. In this city walls between houses become taller with time, and this is not merely for proof against burglars. Doubtlessly mutual distrust is the principal cause.

When will it be that the era of freedom will dawn on



this land of terror, a land shackled in chains, where the "ten caution diseases" are prevalent? In this fascist society nobody can live in peace even for a moment. In fact, all the common people in south Korea are living with one leg in prison.

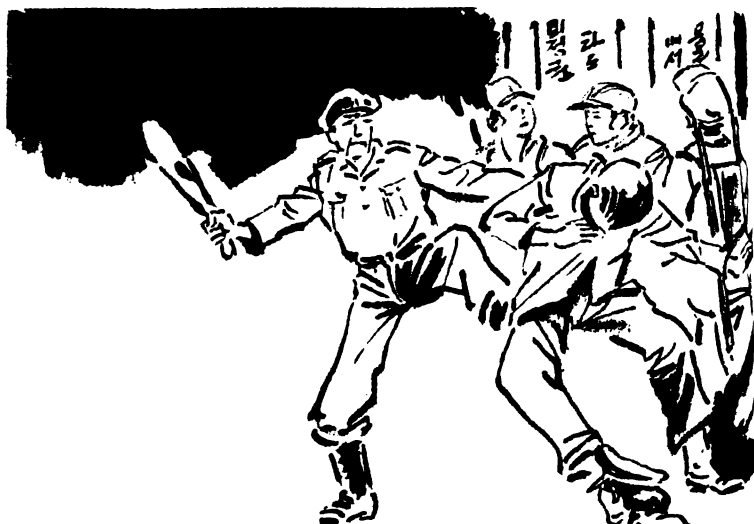
## **Behind Bars at Night**

The night is doubtlessly a painful time. The night of Seoul is trying for the needy who are living in hardships, whereas it is the most "amusing" hours for the privileged classes wallowing in money and wielding power who are indulging in debauchery, pleasures and merrymaking. The night is for the poor to rest their exhausted bodies for a short while after hard toils all day long, and it is still more tormenting for them with a thousand and one worries about their scanty living with gloomy prospects gnawing at their minds. The day is exhausting and the night tormenting for them, but they have no way out.

After I started on the road of a working student, I passed not a single night with a light heart. The night wore on and the day dawned in mental pains caused by the worries about my school expenses and the care of my father and by the thought of lighting the mental burdens of my mother who was secretly shedding tears bearing the brunt of all the family ordeals.

On one of such painful nights I was caught in a police dragnet and brought to face a summary court. My anguish was beyond description. The police searched and arrested citizens by surprise wherever and whenever they pleased. As I turned off into an alley beyond the





Cesil Theatre near Toksu-gol on Taepyong Avenue with an empty A-frame carrier on my back, I saw a crowd of people talking noisily at the place. Since I was going home on an empty stomach, I was not interested in such a scene. But I wondered something might be up and approached them. When I came closer, I saw a bill of a rare sort put up on the wall of a brick house. It listed punishable persons belonging to the privileged classes. Among them were the man in power condemned by the people as "fascist dictator" and vicious comprador capitalists who had amassed a fabulous fortune running into billions by illegal means.





“How is it that only these fellows should be punished? Here is another scoundrel to be condemned,” a middle-aged man said and pencilled down the name of the police chief of Chongno Ward where he was living. This encouraged everyone present to speak out their minds and hastened to write down at random the names of those wicked politicians, army generals, judicial officers and company directors who they hated and detested most bitterly.

It was an amusing spectacle. I stood closer to the wall and ran my eyes over the numerous scribbled names, I recognized some of them, but most of the names were of unfamiliar villains.

With the lapse of time the spirits of the people on the scene rose higher and the crowd swelled rapidly. Then, suddenly police rushed on them with clubs. They hit and hauled away the people gathered there indiscriminately. In the confusion of the moment A-frame porters like me who were mere onlookers were caught and taken to the nearby Seoul metropolitan police station.

There were countless people in the police station who had been caught in the roundup. As I learned it, that evening was scheduled for a roundup under a “directive A No. 1 ” of National Police Headquarters of Seoul. There were police checkups, searches and detentions every hour and every day, and in this dreadful land even a “directive A No. 1 ” was issued now, so that the police station was packed with people caught in the roundup overflowing to the passage ways.

So, as ill luck would have it, I was apprehended on a charge of looking on an incident of scribbling on a night of A No. 1 police roundup. It seemed things would take an ugly turn for me. I was interrogated all night through.



The police investigator grilled me about the reason why I had looked on such scribblings.

"I've just told you, haven't I? As for me, I took a look at it because people were thronging about looking at it," answered I bluntly with an air of disgust.

"You rascal! Do you think you've got eyes to see anything you like?"

"Then if I shouldn't see with my eyes, should I go about with closed eyes like a blind man?"

"Hey, you rat! Should choose things before you see, I'm telling you."

"How can I choose things to see when they're before my eyes? It'll be rather better to be blind man, won't it?" said I sullenly, scandalized.

"Oh, you villain! You've got a glib mouth. Want to have your ribs change places?"

No sooner had he said this than his iron-hard fist thrust into my side. "Oh," I shrieked and fell sideways. I felt as if my breath was cut off. After a good while the fellow clutched my hair and raised the upper half of my body. I barely rose with knit brows and sat on the chair again.

By any reckoning it was preposterous. What is my fault? In what have I offended when I saw a thing before me with my own eyes? As dictated by my conscience I insisted I was innocent. The cruel interrogation went on interminably, the investigator using his fist and kicking and beating me with a club. It was most exasperating that I was beaten up on a charge of just seeing.

There was a "protection room" in the police station. It served as a waiting room of prisoners down for a summary trial. It was July when I was taken to this room, and so it was terribly hot in it. The heat did not abate



until after midnight. All the inmates dripping with sweat looked limp. They were stripped to the waist and their socks were lying in corners. It was stinking in the room with close smell of perspirations, the breath reeking of liquor, the stench from the toilet stool in a corner and .... All the bad odors mixed into one stink peculiar to the "protection room" to assail my nostrils.

It was not long before another batch of drunken men and curfew violators were brought into the room by policemen and members of the crime prevention corps. The large room was filled with hundreds of people waiting for their turn of trial. It was an exhibition of all types of human images with varied facial expressions. The policeman on duty was dozing off outside the bars.

The "protection room" packed with breathing human beings had its own way of life. There were people lying about in disorder regardless of sex with their buttocks touching each other. Some of them were drunken and bawling and squalling and some others were sleeping an unperturbed sleep snoring furiously as if to make up for the lost sleep.

The day broke. All those who had a powerful "backer" to slip a roll of bank notes into the pocket of the police officer during the night were set free.

Only the pitiable people who had neither a "backer" nor money had to face the summary trial. At last, the police chief appeared and judged the "culprits" caught in the police roundup the previous night. He pronounced the "charges" against the innumerable "offenders" and sentenced them to detention in the police cell and a fine. There was a man who was sentenced to ten days' detention and a fine of 20,000 *won*.



"Kim Yong Son—two days' detention in the police cell and a fine of 3,000 *won*" was the penalty imposed on me at the summary court. Well, let them keep me in the cell not for two days but for one month if they pleased. Starved people were said to commit an offense deliberately to be taken into police custody so as to allay their hunger. I could endure detention in the cell as it was, but how could I ever pay the fine when I was unable to pay the membership fees of the education association in the university for want of money?

I lodged an intermediate appeal immediately when the "summary court" ended. I protested that I was not guilty to be fined.

"Damn you villain! None of your contradiction! I'm judging you again. You're sentenced to three days' detention and a fine of 5,000 *won* for your appeal of dissatisfaction", rang out the biting voice of the police chief.

I remained silent. In a word, demur would only incur a larger sum of fine. Burying my head in my hands, I exclaimed in my mind:

"Oh, this is beyond mistake a world of burglars. A world of gangsters. They've bound the people hand and foot and gagged them, and are now going to blindfold them. How can we leave alone this vicious world? Where is the thunderbolt dozing off in the sky? Strike, thunderbolt! Strike this accursed world to fall asunder!"

I was led into the cell from the "summary court," where I passed three sleepless nights, thinking of many things. I now tore at my chest and now wept tears.

There was a woman beside me. Sitting among



menfolks, she awaited her turn of trial all night through, thinking anxiously her little daughter left behind at home. She was fined 1,000 *won* at about three o'clock in the afternoon. She had no money to pay the fine and was to be detained instead. She was ready to burst out crying. Fortunately a certain Mr. Kim of about 30 who, seeing her trouble from aside, took pity and accommodated her with money on the promise of returning it later. So, the woman was let out just before detention. Getting back her social identification card and resident registration card, she went home in a hurry.

In general, "light offenders" were liable to a fine of up to 5,000 *won* or detention in the police cell. At the A police station in Seoul a summary trial was held every 15 seconds. It was said that an average of 100 persons were tried summarily every day and sometimes their number rose to nearly 200. There was a man who had a record of being caught by police and tried summarily 26 times by the time he was 50.

After three nights in the cell, I sealed with the thumb a written apology binding me to pay the fine within three days and was let out. It was really an absurd society ruled by club law. In this fascist society nobody was allowed to walk about with safety and to see anything freely. It would be right to give the name of "fascist tundra" to this fascist hell where people were forced to live with their eyes and mouths shut and as cripples, a shocking grave of human rights.

It was indeed a "tundra" where all beautiful things that were human were frozen to death by the cold wave of fascism.



## The Manufactories of Corpses

If there is a land on earth where people cannot live in peace and freedom under the blue sky although the territory is wide, it is precisely south Korea. Here it is a matter of common occurrence that people are beaten up by cops and thrown into police dungeon and prison without any provocation. In south Korea where human dignity is trampled under foot by government backed by tortures, the prison and the secret chamber of the Central Intelligence Agency (the Security Planning Board at present) are called "houses of blood bath" or "manufactories of corpses".

It is very impressive that a Japanese intellectual said after a visit to south Korea, "When wine is overflowing in the barroom of a hotel, blood is flowing in the basement of Mt. Nam (meaning the torture room of the Central Intelligence Agency)."

This reminds me of lines from a poem written by a poet in Seoul alluding to the social atmosphere like this. They read:

*The land is in ruins,  
And the people are disabled.  
The land of blood  
Is overrun with cripples,  
Is littered with corpses.*

....

The poem is brief but profound in meaning. In south Korea which is denounced by the world public as a "tundra of freedom", fascist club law reigns supreme, so



that upright persons and innocent people are crippled or turned into corpses in prison and torture rooms.

I felt a longing to see teacher Choe who had been in charge of our class in the high school, so one day I called at his home. Towards sunset when the sweltering heat of August was subsiding I knocked at the door of his house in Mapo Ward. The teacher was lying in his gloomy room. Seeing me, he sprang to his feet and stepped forward in a hurry to meet me, only to collapse halfway. He was almost crippled in the legs.

"Teacher!" I exclaimed and ran forward to help him up. Embracing me, he did not know what to do.

"I missed you so, Yong Son!" said he deeply moved. Claspng me to his breast, he stroked my back affectionately, tears glistening in his eyes. We were silent for a while. It was a warm embrace of an honoured teacher and his beloved pupil. My eyes were also wet. He was a person of sturdy build, but he was now weak unable to move his legs freely. I felt sorry for him.

"Teacher, how is it that you cannot move your leg freely?"

"My leg? That's 'present' of this club-ridden society to me. In this society survival itself is miracle. If I am told to draw a picture of south Korea, I think I will draw a 'club and chains'."

A look of contempt and hatred came to his face; he appeared to curse the fascist society. Sitting by the window holding my hands in his, the teacher told me how it all had come about.

Teacher Choe had been arrested a few years before on the charge of teaching in classes of the high school the truth about the historical facts in connection with the incident of Korean emissaries dispatched to the Hague.



He was examined at an interrogation room in a basement like the "basement of Mt. Nam."

"As soon as I entered the interrogation room, they rained blows on me with clubs. That was the 'first greeting' of the bloodthirsty felons to frighten me before interrogation," he began his shocking hard-luck story hiding the feeling of anguish with great effort. Teacher Choe had been beaten almost to the point of swooning before he was subjected to examination.

"Hey, surely you know where you're now? This is basement No.4. Four means death, I tell you. (The characters four and death have the same sound.) This is where you come in alive and go out dead, understand?"

From the first the words of the fiend were reeking of blood. He was not exaggerating but telling the truth. The equipment of the torture room was horrible. There were all sorts of racking tools from super-modern appliances to mediaeval implements of torture which could give men the greatest pains.

In boxes with iron grids lying in a corner of the room, cobras presumably from Africa and snakes like Indian vipers were darting out their tongues. There was an apparatus looking like a forge to heat irons red-hot. In another corner was a cage with a grating, in which a hungry tiger showed its ferocious appearance on and off under a blinking electric light. Teacher Choe said this was the scene he saw when he came to and opened his eyes after falling senseless under a rain of blows. It was so fearful a sight at first that he shut his eyes instinctively. In short, it was a torture room of savages.

From the next room came unceasingly plaintive screams of a woman put to the rack. And the cries of children brought to tease the woman in interrogation



were also heard to come from far and near. It was virtually a hell. An ordinary man was not likely to hold out even for an hour in this slaughter-house. At last, the fiend spoke up:

"You answer the questions obediently from the first. The United States is our ally, and why did you give lectures before the students accusing the friendly nation, eh?"

The moment he finished saying this, the fellow landed his fist in the chest of teacher Choe. Hit by surprise in a vital part, the teacher fell down again. It was a good while before he rose and resumed his seat. Then he protested gently:

"Look here, Mister. Why should you start by hitting? Let's talk over the matter like gentlemen."

"Oh, you devil have got a glib tongue. Do you think this is a classroom of the high school? You swine! This is a manufactory of cripples."

A manufactory of cripples? Yes, that was right. Whoever spent one day in this abode of demons was sure to see himself crippled. The interrogator was a shorty. He must have drunk whisky from a bottle or taken a strong dose of stimulant. The devil yelled out with set teeth:

"Now, out with it! Why did you abuse the United States?"

"I only taught the students history."

"History?"

"So it is. The patriot Mr. Li Jun's last words are a historical fact beyond any dispute, aren't they?" answered the teacher Choe trying to speak in accordance with reason.

"You rascal! What's history? Do you think all facts



make history? The United States is helping us today. Nevertheless, what? If we rely on the United States, we shall be ruined, is that what you said? To all appearances, you're a seditious element, there's no mistake about it!"

At last, the shorty started torturing him in real earnest. He tormented Mr. Choe by applying an electric club of a new type ordered specially from the United States to his arms and legs and torso. The brute seared with a red-hot iron rod the joint region of the right knee of the teacher who was shouting with pain. So, the super-modern method of torture using the electric club was combined with the premodern way of torturing by searing with fire.

A school teacher by profession, Mr. Choe could hardly bear it. In an accute pain as if his leg being cut off, he fainted and fell down from the chair once more. The fiend dashed cold water in the face of his victim and gave him an injection to bring him round, but the senseless man did not come to.

Teacher Choe opened his eyes two days after he had been carried into the underground cell on a stretcher. The vital force of a man was amazing. It seemed it was his will power that enabled him to survive even such a terrible torture. The teacher rose to his feet with difficulty with the help of other inmates, but collapsed as he was taking a step forward with his right leg. Paralyzed under the impact of a strong shock, his right leg had no sensation of blood circulation.

"Is this how a man becomes a cripple? The devil was right when he said this was a manufactory of cripples," thought Mr. Choe to himself.

Dragging his leg, he crept to the iron bars and looked out into the passageway. The moment he saw the scene



there, he shuddered with horror. Corpses were being carried outside ceaselessly through the passageway on stretchers. In the opposite room many people were wriggling their bodies, who were still alive but were drawing a long breath on the verge of death. A few seconds or minutes, and they will also stop wriggling and turn into corpses.

"How can they ever leave those dying men alone? They must have been tortured and maimed like me. This country is a hell and a grave of innocent people!" Mr. Choe shouted in his mind.

Now teacher Choe was callous to fear and dread. Only hatred was left in him. A middle-aged man who had been leaning against the wall of the cell gazing out of the skylight in deep thought, seemed to guess the mind of the teacher. He spoke to him:

"Look here, my friend. You needn't be surprised at the sight of it. This basement is a manufactory of corpses. Who can tell we won't be killed soon like those people? Seoul where justice is murdered behind bars and injustice is swaggering about the streets of Myongdong, or rather the whole of south Korea, is a manufactory of corpses. This society should be overturned at all costs."

As he said this, his eyes shone and flashed with wrath.

Mr. Choe looked tired and lay down on the floor, calling me:

"Yong Son, my boy. That was when I lost the free use of my leg."

His eyes blazed with hatred and anger like charcoal fire. Darkness came on. The veil of dreary and lonely night began to fall under the roof of the shanty with low eaves. As I was listening to the teacher, many things I



had witnessed and heard of there crowded through my mind.

Under the tyranny of terrorist government, government propped up by tortures and homicidal government, people were disabled or murdered every day. The thought of this made my heart burn with implacable hatred.



## **4. Save Korea**

It may as well be said that south Korea, “my country inhabited by aliens,” is a strange land ridden by foreign souls and swayed by foreign ways. Isn’t it indeed the last state of the United States or a Japanese concession? Save Korea, my country and my land, by expelling the aliens from it and building it up. Let’s recover the lost self and thus save it.

### **“My Country Inhabited by Aliens”**

“My country inhabited by aliens” is a figurative expression applied to south Korea which is condemned and ridiculed by the world public as a colony of the United States.

Anyway, the land is no doubt our own homeland where we were born, but it is inhabited by aliens. In fact, south Korea is “my country” which is of Korea but where Korea is closed to the view.

Needless to say, we were born here and raised with the national juice and grew up by taking the alimments of the motherland. We have built up our land with the warmest passion and cared for our sky and our brothers and sisters with the purest love. But we see a strange land here which is ours but at the same time not ours. We live in sorrow in this familiar yet strange land.

Ritaewon-dong in Ryongsan Ward of Seoul may well



be looked up as an epitome of "my country inhabited by aliens." Whenever I take a stroll in Ritaewon-dong, the thought occurs to me that "it is not that the United States is present in south Korea but that south Korea is living in the United States."

One day I went to Ritaewon-dong with Miss Sun I. After school I set out for the "UN forces' base settlement" to seek a night job, when she followed me. She had her own business to attend to there. She wanted to call on her cousin sister in the neighbourhood.

Ritaewon-dong was familiar place to me, but it was in "America within Seoul" as others would say.

It occurred to me that some people called Ritaewon-dong by the nickname of "So-America" meaning America within Seoul. America had struck its roots as deep as this in Seoul.

The place went by the name of Samda-dong (Block Abounding in Three Things) because it was crowded with people of different races and abundant with women, Western wines and dollars.

Exotic scenes would catch the eyes of people who came to the approach to the place. This was so not only to the newcomers but also to those who had visited it many times.

Most of the signboards were scrawled in English and most of the people swarming the streets were foreigners.

Ritaewon-dong came to be called an "international city in south Korea" after it had been turned into a UN forces' base settlement. Here national insult and racial discrimination were rife and American haughtiness prevailed. Scenes of American-style "puppy love" as fleeting as lightning and exaggerated "parting for life"



were enacted and various wines and licentious songs overflowed the amusement quarters.

It was July and the weather was sultry. With Miss Sun I, I reached the Hilton tailor shop near a police box past Block No. 1 of Ritaewon-dong lined with over 700 shops, when Miss Sun I who was walking by my side let out, "What an appalling sight!"

Looking ahead, I saw half-naked people crowding in the street.

My eyes popped with amazement. "UN soldiers" including US army men, and foreigners were walking about in shorts irrespective of sex. To be seen among them were Koreans from the privileged classes who liked foreign mode of life. Young men and women in underpants and half-naked women in their twenties.... In a word, the street crowded with people in "simple summer attire" in the sweltering heat, the street filled with half-naked people of different colours, was remindful of a crowded bathing resort. It would have been the very scenery of a swimming beach if there were a sea and the sands.

At the sight of this abominable scene, an old woman in her sixties who was passing by us said, clicking her tongue:

"Ugh, how disgusting! To move about in the street in the nude like that! The Westerners are originally an uncivil breed. Tut, tut!"

Somehow the old woman's muttering came home to us, Miss Sun I and me. Of course, as Ritaewon-dong was frequented by foreigners, it was in fact a place where things Western and fashion would come in most quickly, and especially dress fashions. But my mind was taken up by the disaffected thought that why Yankees



should come and spread their vulgar ways in my country.

I was passing in front of the "Peko" bag shop beside the Hamilton Hotel. A US soldier who came to buy a bag was haggling with the owner of the shop, rolling his yellow eyes.

"How much?" demanded the Yankee haughtily.

"It's 20,000 *won*."

"20,000 *won*? Too high. Sell it for 8,000 *won*. I want to give it to a comfort girl."

"What? 8,000 *won*? That won't cover even the cost. Please go to other shops."

The owner of the shop turned away from the US soldier, clicking his tongue in disgust.

"I'm an American. You must sell it me cheap even at a loss."

The shopkeeper was eyeing him in blank surprise when the Yankee snatched a bag abruptly from the counter and went out without paying for it.

The American was unmistakably a thief. For a long time I stood staring at the Yankee who was walking off with a thing on sale from a shop in broad daylight. Although I had known that Yankees were downright thieves, I was now convinced of the fact still more firmly.

Fuming with rage, the shopkeeper spat after the receding Yankee and swore viciously:

"Be hanged! If I'm spared the sight of those scoundrels, I shall put on weight even if I skip ten meals. Hum! Shame on you! Tut!"

The man was beside himself with anger. His heart seethed with resentment against the Yankees who were indulging in robbery and outrages in foreign countries.

It was Friday. At about four o'clock in the afternoon



the Yankees of the US 8th Army poured out. Shops on the street bustled with US soldiers from four o'clock in the afternoon when the on-duty hours in the US army ended to ten o'clock at night.

On Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays which were their off days, shops were alive with US soldiers and other foreign customers. In these hours the Yankees would buy the goods that caught their fancy at cheap prices or snatch away from the shops.

Not a day passed but US soldiers committed wanton outrages in Ritaewon-dong. In the evenings when the sun was setting, the street of Ritaewon-dong seemed to writhe due to US soldiers' evildoings. Ritaewon-dong is regarded as the No. 1 pleasure haunt. There are restaurants, night clubs, disco clubs and even many amusement houses where strip teases are done after midnight. Not only this, there are top secret restaurants where money can buy all sorts of amusement.

By night the streets within 500 metres of the fire station make a world of its own. There are seven special tourist agencies exclusively for foreigners, 20-odd disco clubs, two night clubs and over 30 small clubs, and the streets present nightmarish scenes with obscene music and shrieks of those who dance noisily which flow out of them.

People call this place a "Texas of the United States." In the "Texas alley" a women market booms at night. It was an abominable fact that 400 young girls were selling their chastity to US soldiers.

The dark veil of night fell and Miss Sun I and I were passing by the Granolafri Club to call on her cousin sister, when a tall Yankee soldier poked fun at Miss Sun I. "Hello, girl student."







She darted a glance at him and trotted along nestling close to me.

"Hello, girl."

The tipsy Yankee smelling of liquor blocked her way.

"Let's go over there. I have a lot of money. I feel good tonight. I'll give you up to 60 dollars."

With this the Yankee tried to take Miss Sun I by the hand.

"Get away. I'm not a street girl for Yankees."

Miss Sun I said sharply, brushing away the hairy hand of the Yankee.

"Hey, the south Korean women are all mine."

This said, the Yankee tried to take Miss Sun I forcibly into an alley. Miss Sun I slapped him in the face. Though a classmate for a long time, I had never known her as such a tough girl.

The US soldier rubbed his cheek and made to bounce on the girl breathing hard like a beast.

I could bear no more. I jumped on him swiftly and knocked him down with a single blow on the face. Passers-by gathered round us and talked loudly, saying scornfully that it served the American soldier right to fall sprawling on the ground. Everyone of the crowd cursed the US soldier.

A running police car stopped abruptly in front of the crowd and two policemen pushed their way through the people to come near to the sprawling US soldier. Miss Sun I and I left the place without delay, feeling no need to argue about the incident with the cops. The policemen who were cat's paws of the Americans were unlikely to side with the south Korean people. We heard from behind shouts of the policemen and voices of the onlookers who were giving account of what happened.



"The US soldier poked fun at a passing girl."

"The US soldier's in the wrong, and he got his deserts."

Offended at the cynical remarks of the people, the cops said angrily:

"Shut up. He must have taken her for a whore catering to foreigners. Who is that has beaten the US soldier in violation of order?"

People cursed and resented the way the policemen pleaded for the Yankee before their own people in their land.

"Are the policemen a Yankee breed?"

"The policemen turn their back on the people and plead for foreigners. They may as well kill themselves."

"Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? You fellows are inferior even to worms."

Sun I and I hurried on our way hearing their angry voices behind us.

Whose land is this, so that the Yankees are swaggering about like that and the traitors are dancing to their tune?

At this thought my heart burned with indignation.

## **Around the Base Settlement**

American soldiers in hobnailed boots strut about this land where the soul of my nation and the dreams of my people dwell, the homeland where there are our ancestral graves and streams dear to us are flowing as ever.

South Korea swarms all over with 40,000 US troops, so the whole of south Korea is trampled by their boots and has been turned into a US army base settlement.



Around the base settlements stand many posts with the inscriptions "Off Limits for Koreans".

The US soldiers can go anywhere like masters in south Korea, but the Koreans who are unmistakably its masters are treated like slaves of the US army and are not permitted to go where they like.

I heard say that one is paid 100,000 *won* for several days' odd jobs in the US army base settlement in Tongduchon, and during a vocation I boarded a bus bound for Tongduchon for the first time. The place lies 40 kilometres north of Seoul and can be reached by a bus in an hour. It is surely an "alien zone in south Korea". The buildings lining the road reminded me of the back lot for filming a Western. All the signboards were written in English. The Korean girls striding along close together with US soldiers were dressed just like European girls. I felt as if I were in a foreign country. It seemed to me that Korea was really being lost.

Saengyon-dong and Posan-dong in the central part of the township of Tongduchon have 24 clubs catering to the US soldiers. Everything was for the US troops.

Through the good offices of a distant relative who ran a small store in Posan-dong, I got a job as ice carrier to the night club, "Hollywood". The base settlement is an alien district devoid of morality and sovereignty. The south Koreans living in the base settlement are all servants of Yankees satisfying their wild frenzy. A typical example is afforded by the Yankees' whores. How lamentable it is that though beaten and kicked by them almost every day, those women should serve the Yankees!

When we awake in the morning we hear that last



night someone beaten by a GI had his front teeth broken or was stabbed with jackknife.

Murder is of frequent occurrence.

One night, around 11 o'clock, I left the club to fetch ice for the next day's use. At this hour a hectic sinful day in the base settlement would give way to fitful sleep. Pulling a barrow, I entered the alley by the "Oasis Club" past the record shop, when I saw a noisy crowd in the narrow lane between the club and a tailor's. Prompted by curiosity, I stepped towards them and was dumb-founded. I found a woman screaming, kicked and trampled by GIs. I saw she was a prostitute catering to Yankees although her dress was torn and her upper body was almost naked.

I had a great contempt for those street walkers. Selling their smile and body to Yankees of all others, how could they be called humans? They were ugly creatures who did not feel shame at their own conduct.

I still had contempt and repugnance for them even after I came to the base settlement. Nevertheless, I could not but pity them while resenting the outrages by the US soldiers.

Indeed, it is in the human nature to sympathize with the weak who are maltreated. After all, the woman was my compatriot who had the Korean blood in her veins like me. I could not repress national indignation at the sight of her being so mercilessly outraged by Yankees.

It turned out that US soldier James who was having a good time of it at a nightclub with his contractual mistress got drunk and staked her in gambling. To the US soldiers a contracted mistress was no more than a speaking plaything. His partner shouted for joy at the unexpected move of James, flashing his eyes



like a crazy man, and the kibitzers clapped their hands.

When James lost his game, he told her without scruples:

"Miss Li, there is still two months left till the termination of your contract with me. Now, serve John until the end of the term."

No sooner had James said this than one US soldier after another tried to touch her person and humiliate her.

She turned pale and bit her lips almost to the bleeding point, a tremor passing over her face. She suddenly slapped one of the US soldiers across the face and shouted, "You dirty sons of a bitch."

Something violent and sharp was emanating from her voice, her expression and her fingertips.

When they came to, the US soldiers saw she was just going out at the door. They rushed out into the street in pursuit of her, yelling like beasts going after their prey.

Seeing that they were coming in pursuit, she broke into a run like a scared rabbit. She ran even without knowing that her high-heeled shoes slipped off, but a woman could not run very long. She was caught by the beasts before she went far. When she cried in a flurry, "Help, help!" the US soldiers beat and kicked her as cruelly as cannibals. Encouraged by his mates, James drew out his jackknife. He meant to stab her with it. A middle-aged man who was looking on the scene grabbed the arm of the fellow out of patience, saying:

"You, the US soldiers, profess yourselves to be protectors of the south Korean people. Are you doing this by way of protection?"

"US soldiers don't know that kind of words used by politicians. You get out of my way."

James made to push him away by force. As things



came to this point, curses broke out from the crowd and young people surrounded the US soldiers, rolling up their sleeves.

Sensing that the spectators were enraged, the US soldiers shrugged their shoulders and sneaked away.

The chairman of the "Dandelion Society", the autonomous organization of the street girls, came with a few women and helped up the prostrate, sobbing woman and disappeared with her. Walking off with difficulty, the woman cried:

"We are also human beings and have a sense of shame....

She could say no more due to sobs. Tears streamed down her cheeks. My heart was rent by the thought, "Oh, those are tears of blood shed by a woman writhing with pain stigmatized as a 'Yankee's whore' "

Faced with the humiliating situation which showed a sad aspect of the reality in this country where Korean women were a prey to the bestial lust of the Yankees, I felt a sharp mental twinge.

Even if I cannot go to university for lack of funds, I must quit this job which is aimed at the filthy dollars of US soldiers and the odd money of the poor girls earned by catering to them.

As I was leaving this US army base settlement where our national pride was bruised, I uttered words in spite of myself:

"The US army is the master of this land. This is a stark fact though painful and sad.

"The United States holds sway in the political, economic, cultural, military and other affairs in this land because it is its colony. The US soldiers kill men and women, young and old, at random in this land and yet



swagger about the streets unscathed, whistling, because they are colonial rulers.

“Many our women are outraged and trampled underfoot mercilessly. Freedom and democracy are not realized although university students and democratic figures are crying for them, falling and bleeding. All this is due to prolonged US colonial rule.”

As I walked down the street in depression, my heart was as heavy as lead. When will it be that we shake off the humiliating fate of colonial people?

## **The Streets Where the Japanese Are Swaggering About**

Although the River Han and Mt. Pugak are ours, many areas in south Korea are off-limits zones to the Koreans. In addition to the US military bases, the “Japanese communities” are such places. In Seoul there are “Japanese communities”, which are gradually extending their area to Japanize the whole of south Korea.

The streets known as “Japanese communities” are Hangang apartment district in Ichon-dong and foreigners’ district in Hannam-dong which are most populated by the Japanese in Seoul.

I had often been to the streets called “Japanese communities” sometimes carrying an A-frame on my back and other times wheeling a barrow along.

When a school bus comes round the corner of the street, a noisy group of Japanese children in smart attire run towards the bus, waving their mothers standing nearby. The Japanese words “ka-chang” (mama) and “gakko” (school) make the passersby turn their eyes to



them. Such a scene to be encountered every morning at some residential quarters of Seoul makes one keenly feel that "Japanese communities" are coming to stay in Seoul.

With a gradual increase in their number, such Japanese are changing over from a simple "alien group" into an "organized alien community".

The Japanese way of life and fashions spread by the Japanese communities as they become animated with time encroach on our life like toadstools and prey on the pure soul of our people. Meanwhile, Japanese tourists surge into south Korea and stride along the streets proudly.

It seems south Korea, the once "near yet faraway land," has changed into a "near and cheap tourist resort" for the Japanese Don Juans.

One autumn I carried a Japanese tourist's luggage in the P hotel, the highest building in Seoul. When I entered the hotel, my eyes popped with amazement. I knew that the amusement quarters were flooded most with Japanese ways, but what should flow out of the P hotel but Japanese popular songs! Singers on the stage of the nightclub in the hotel were singing Japanese songs, "*Farewell, Port Town!*" "*Adieu to Tokyo!*" When their songs ended, Japanese popular songs sung by Japanese singers flowed out of a tape-recorder. Among them were "*Across the Hill,*" "*The Night When It Drizzled over the Acacias,*" "*La Donne Mobile*" sung by Fujiyama Ichiro in the past.

Seeing me in the passageway, a worker of the hotel said with a bitter smile:

"South Korea is showing signs of ruin. They're singing only Japanese pop songs like that, because



Japanese songs are more familiar to them than Korean songs. The tastes of people are also changing gradually. Without Japanese songs, they don't seem to feel merry. Some thoughtless customers join in singing Japanese songs and often speak Japanese."

He deplored that the national spirit was suffering.

After a while a Japanese tune was struck up again on the stage of the nightclub, when a group of Japanese tourists poured in. They sang in chorus "In the Excess of Mirth" and began to dance a Japanese dance. As the Japanese tourists danced the twist together, the singer on the stage lifted his voice to a higher pitch. The atmosphere was now entirely Japanese.

Our compatriots from Japan turned their eyes from the sickening sight. At this moment, a young man in his thirties abruptly rose and shouted:

"Hey there, do you think this is Japan? Stop it right away."

His shout permeated with patriotic ardour drowned all the other noises in the hall. All eyes were turned upon the young man, whose eyes were burning with anger.

A haughty Japanese businessman under the influence of alcohol came up to the young man and said bluntly:

"What if we sing Japanese songs?"

The young man rejoined sharply how they dared have their own way in this land which was not Japan. They wrangled. Encouraged by his colleagues, the Japanese businessman with glasses perched on the bridge of his nose angrily fired back:

"Hey, you Seoul beggar, get out of here right now. Although this is Korea, it's as good as Japan."

"What? Japan?"



"Yes. South Korea is a pauper nation living on the money of Japan, I tell you."

"What? Pauper? Yes, we are badly off. But we do not care for Japanese like you. We regard Japan as our sworn enemy."

Rough words were exchanged between them and the angry Japanese businessman shouted:

"Hey, waiter. Turn out this beggar at once. I'm annoyed."

"What? Beggar?"

"I say you are beggars. Do you know how much debts your country owes Japan? Hey, if I withdraw my money, six of your companies will have to close down, you know?"

"I don't care how much capital you've invested. But are you so haughty because you take our times for the old days of Japanese colonial rule?"

"You ought to consider it fortunate that your country was our colony for 36 years."

The young man breathed hard in rage. He felt like striking him in the face.

Scared by the angry glare of the youth, the Japanese businessman hastily called, "Hey, waiter, waiter."

A waiter came out, and after a while a secret policeman turned up and walked off the youth by force.

When the youth shouted that the Japanese capitalist should be taught a lesson the secret policeman slapped him hard in the face, shouting, "No offence should be given to the Japanese. It's the directions from the Blue House. Understand?"

The youth was dragged away somewhere in the darkness by the secret policeman. The patriotic spirit of the youth who burned with anti-Japanese sentiments



appealed to me. I was also unable to stand the sight of the Japanese. Whose land is this that the Japanese should lord it over here as if their days of glory have returned as the young man said? All the scene reminded me of the Japanese flag put up even on the counter of the department store. Together with my classmates I had once gone to take a look at the "special imported goods counter" on the fourth floor of the Sinsegye Department Store in Seoul. As I stood before the counter, I opened my eyes wide in astonishment. Japanese toys modelled on the Japanese imperialist plane *Kamikaze* used in suicide units in World War II, Japanese soldier, Japanese tank, armoured car, motorcycle and car were in display, attracting the eyes of naive children of Korea. The Japanese toys had Japanese flags raised on them, and their prices were exorbitant. The customers crowding the Sinsegye Department Store stood long before the counter. They would leave the spot with a parting remark:

"How come the ghosts of Japanese imperialism have revived in Seoul to appear openly at the counter, even with the Japanese flag hoisted over them?"

"I wonder what the authorities are doing when Japan has revived and is coming back. Are they dozing off?"

They vented their discontent in spite of themselves. All of them tilted their heads, wondering how the toys carrying the apparition of Japanese imperialism with them could even have passed through the customs as "teaching aids" for children.

I burned with national indignation to think of all this.



## **“Let Us Restore Our Self!”**

The sense of resistance grew in the university quarters. As time went by and students moved up to higher grades, they grew not only in intellect. Their eye for the world became clearer and their adherence to truth strengthened. They vehemently resisted the evil reality and burned with a strong desire to know and claim their self. The fervent students in their twenties who were sensitive to truth and had an aversion to falsehood were united in their minds. Freedom and truth were dearer to them than their physical lives.

The sense of social justice was ablaze on the campus of the K university. The credo that “United, we stand; divided, we fall,” firmly knit their minds together as the students were pressing on towards the square of freedom and justice. In the university demonstrations were staged often and leaflets were scattered ceaselessly, where secret agents swarmed and plainclothesmen lurked everywhere. The secret agents in school uniform were called “decoys”. The students kept their eyes wide open to detect and isolate the “decoys”.

One day the second-year students of the politics and diplomacy department held debates on the subject of “national Juche and the reality of south Korea” on the campus. But this fact became known to the university authorities, and students had a hard time.

Following this incident, our classmates found out that Chang Sol was the informer and accused him. When Chang Sol was about to pass the university gate, they surrounded and denounced him. Everyone said his say:



"Hey, you mercenary worm. How much money did you get in reward for reporting?"

"I tell you straight. As you reported on several students you must know you won't escape punishment."

"It's I that made a threatening phone call to your home last night. And also I sent a threatening letter to your house."

"Do you think you have the whole world at your disposal just because your father is a director of the Sinhung Foundation? Cancer take you, a lackey of the Yankees and the Japanese."

"Butchery seems to be in your nature. So try and prey on your classmates again."

"You've become an orphan on the campus by defiling your own youth. How dare you swagger about under the sun with our university badge on your breast?"

"Hey, stop giving off the nasty smell of perfume. Shame on you! You attempted to seduce Miss Sun I with the bait of sending to the United States for study, didn't you?"

"For shame, you blockhead. Get out of sight this moment! You fatty who buys admission to university and also a diploma with money!"

Sun Ho and other students gave it Chang Sol hot and strong, giving vent to their pent-up anger. The curly-head of the politics and diplomacy department ironized, mimicking a priest:

"Drop it, you. What's all this? You shouldn't denounce the son of the company director so severely even if he is a fool and a decoy. So much will be enough to frighten this young master out of his wits and to make him feel dizzy.



"And you young master Chang Sol. How can you with any grace appear again in our class? What about leaving our university this very day and going to the far-off United States for study? Amen."

The friends burst into laughter all at once. Chang Sol flushed red as flame.

"You're teasing me, are you? Well, you shall smart for this."

Yelling like this, he fled into the car waiting outside.

"Your Excellency Chang Sol, you'll feel refreshed. Ha, ha, ha."

The friends shook their fists at the back of the fellow who was hurriedly receding into the distance with a wry smile.

The united strength of the friends was strong. After that Chang Sol did not appear at the university any more. It was said that he would give up the K university and go to the United States for study.

United, people could win in everything. After such incidents took place many times, the university authorities said in a threatening tone that there were alarming movements on the campus. They warned that if there was a seditious movement impairing the academic atmosphere, those involved would be struck off the student list. However, the students did not take heed of the warning.

Several days passed after that. Prof. Cho Un Song was expected to give a lecture on politics. Students would always impatiently wait for his lectures. His lectures were alive with a national spirit and great truth and showed a way out from the grim reality which the students were seeking in anguish. Prof. Un Song, a doctor of politics, whom even the vicious university



authorities could not provoke recklessly for his authority, was very popular among the students.

At last, Prof. Un Song appeared in the classroom of the second-year class of the politics and diplomacy department. The students clapped their hands in welcome all at once.

He nodded to them in acknowledgement, and wrote the theme of his special lecture in bold hand on the blackboard. It was "Let us regain our self." The eyes of all the students glistened. They read the letters once more. The words had a powerful appeal to the young souls who were living in this wandering age when they





were dragged about as prisoners to the fate without their own self.

I, too, had no self of mine, and my friends and my parents, or rather, Seoul and all the south Korean people were deprived of their self and were hauled off in chains imposed on them by the will of others.

Each word of Prof. Un Song taught us profound truth: "Students, we must know and recover our own self. In the past we were too ignorant of ourselves. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates said, 'Man, know thyself', but we were ignorant of ourselves, coming down through many societies and ages."

His words had deep meaning. He went on in a resonant voice:

"Look around us. How many people are wandering, lost to their self? The ideas of human destruction which make us ignorant of our self are eroding our ideal society.

"When aliens domineered as masters of this land in our place, when aliens swaggered about in this land where our forefathers are lying in graves, we accepted this humiliating reality as our fate, didn't we?

"We must take back our lost self and restore our lost fields and build up our land where we are living."

The eyes of Sun Ho and Il Su who were listening to the professor's fiery speech flashed with excitement and the tears of joy stood in the eyes of Sun I who was taking a glimpse into her father's lofty spiritual world.

As I was listening to his words, I was reminded of the past days when I, being the sport of fortune, cried over poverty and absence of rights, and the ruinous reality of my country where the Yankees and the Japanese were ruling the roost flowed in my mental kaleidoscope.

The voice of Prof. Un Song rang out again.



“We cannot live any more like prisoners chained to fate. We must break the chains like Prometheus appearing in the Greek myth.

“Fortunately, we have come to know the highest idea of modern times which shows us the way of mastering and carving out our own destiny.

“The idea made us humans know ourselves, gave us the instrument to recover our self and led us to shape our own destiny.

“Students, let us know and recover our self!”

The professor’s speech did not end, but the students were at the climax of their excitement. They billowed like the seas as is usually the case with those who discovered truth.

After lecture, the students did not leave the classroom for a long time. What valuable truth the professor taught them through his lecture and how many meanings it conveyed to them!

The force of truth was strong. The truth taught by the professor was terrible for those who are given to injustice. Therefore, the university authorities did not take kindly to the professor.

The professor’s lecture was recorded through a secret listening device installed in the classroom and was called in question by the vicious university authorities. He was now placed on the blacklist of the agents of the Security Planning Board (formerly the Central Intelligence Agency). After that, pressure was brought to bear upon him in various ways. This news spread in the university and the students began to stir.

One evening after a few days, Sun Ho invited me to go to the Haksa Teahouse. Together with Il Su and Miss Sun I, I went to the tea house. It was serving simple



meals to the customers. We entered a secret room by the back door. To my surprise, I found there students familiar to me and the senior students I occasionally met on the campus. As I learned later, they were members of the ideological circle called Koryo Association.

The circle which went by the name of "underground circle" or "underground university" was engaged in the work of awakening the students ideologically. It was one of the common ideological circles which existed where there were young intellectuals who searched for truth and had discontent about the reality. It was said that there were hundreds or thousands of circles like that in the universities.

I was high strung as I was attending the ideological circle's gathering for the first time.

As I learned it later, during vacations they went to the suburbs or to certain farmhouses in groups of 20 or 30 persons to evade the eyes of the secret agents, and read papers on some subjects for two hours a week and held intensive discussions twice or so in one school term.

This ideological awakening work was carried out in seven stages:

1st stage—reading of social science books;

2nd stage—reading of revolutionary books;

3rd stage—seven days' study during the vacation;

4th stage—popularization of revolutionary songs and furthering of the atmosphere of ideological awakening;

5th stage—review of what they have studied and independent promotion of ideological awakening by forming their own organizations;



6th stage—putting into effect the directions of the higher organizations;

7th stage—taking action in the decisive hour.

Their typical daily schedule for ideological awakening work during the vacation was still more interesting. It was as follows:

5:00 a.m.	Rising
6:30 a.m.	Breakfast
8:00 a.m.	Cleaning the village
From 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.	Physical labour
From 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.	Supper and talks with inhabitants
From 9:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m.	Discussion meeting

It was a wonderful timetable of daily life which I saw first. I was deeply impressed by the meeting of the ideological circle that day where members of the Koryo Association were gathered. I had only striven to acquire knowledge and pursue learning, but the members of the Koryo Association, while studying, had been endeavouring to find the ways of restoring their self and their country and of reforming this unfair society, and discussing the patriotic problems as to who should play the leading part of shouldering such a heavy responsibility.

I thought I was lagging too far behind the times and the students' contemporary spirit. What surprised me most was the fact that my companion Kang Sun Ho was a leading member of this ideological circle Koryo Association. I heard that Miss Sun I and Il Su had sworn in writing and joined the circle a month ago.

So, that was why their words and deeds had been so



lofty in the past! To think of it, I felt dizzy to look up at their spiritual height. Above all, I endlessly envied Sun Ho and looked up at him with a feeling of trust.

The problem discussed by the circle that day was the subject "Let us restore our self" lectured by Prof. Cho Un Song a few days ago. Then the students held heated debates on the theme "Our mission to recover self."

Yun Chol Min, fourth-year student of the philosophy department of S university who presided over the meeting of the Koryo Association that evening, concluded the debates in these words:

"We came to know ourselves and our position in the bloodshed of Kwangju. We should strive to restore our self in accordance with the idea Prof. Cho Un Song taught us.

"We must not take the pro- but anti-US course. By adopting the anti-US course, we must steer back in the right direction the country ruined through the pro-US policy.

"The blood shed by Kwangju citizens and the resentments of Mt. Mudung and the Kwangju River showed us the course.

"The US Cultural Centre in Pusan was burnt down already in the first anti-US flames.

"We must declare the anti-US intentions of us, the young people, in Seoul.

"Recently demonstrations continue to take place in all the universities. We must stage a demonstration in our university, too, in two days. It has been decided already that Sun Ho will take charge of the preparations for the demonstration.

"Now, my friends, our secret is more precious than our lives.



**“Those who are ready to guard our secret of today as we would our lives, show your hands with me.”**

**All the students stood up at once and raised their hands in good spirits . I followed their suit.**

**It was an overnight republic of students inaccessible to police, army, secret agents and judicial officers. The whole universe was reflected in the tea cup. But it was a dark hell outside.**

**They were burning with youthful fervours. Leaving the Haksa Teahouse that night, I was excited as never before. I felt like greeting the sunrise. It looked as if the hardships of my life had vanished and I felt the blood of resistance rushing through the veins to my fists.**



## 5. On the Burning Streets

Is man captive to fate? We cannot be the sport of fortune, however.

We will be "Prometheus unbound" to guard freedom. Endless streams of demonstrators heading for the plaza of liberty like roaring waves....

### The Flag

Where there were justice and conscience, there were curses incurred on the society steeped in evils. Where there were righteous students, there were demonstrations.

When in the past student demonstrators filed through the campus and out to the streets, I plunged into their streams a few times. At that time, however, the whirlwinds of demonstrations sweeping the universities were a trend of the times. So I only mechanically tailed behind the processions.

But as demonstrations continued and I saw the simmering resentments of students against the reality; I felt the spirit of resistance to society burgeoning in my heart in spite of myself. I had thought that to work my way through university and acquire knowledge was all of my ideal and life, but in my heart there grew gradually the rebellious thought that the society full of contradic-



tions should not be kept going.

One day Sun Ho called on me and said:

"Yong Son, may I entrust you with the first assignment from our Koryo Association?"

"What's that?"

"You're a good writer, aren't you? You've studied with an ambition to become a writer."

"So, what is it?"

"I want you to write a high-toned inflammatory declaration to be read out at tomorrow's demonstration."

"Write a declaration?"

"Yes. This is not an assignment I give you wilfully. I discussed the matter with the fourth-year student Chol Min. You may think that it is a task assigned you by the students' association of the university."

I felt diffident about the task, but I accepted it, the first directive of the Koryo Association, with good grace.

The declaration would have to be written in denunciation of the unwarranted expulsion of conscientious professors by the Ministry of Education, watch on the campuses by secret agents and commercialization of universities.

Recently rumours were afloat that Prof. Cho Un Song who was popular with the students were placed under secret police surveillance and that therefore he was going to retire under the age limit. The dismissed professors had lodged written protests with the university authorities.

The Ministry of Education and secret police were increasing their pressure on the autonomous students' association. This wrongful practice stimulated the students' spirit of resistance and indignation. The students'



association of the university decided to launch a demonstration struggle, reflecting their mentality and resentment.

As I was penning the inflammatory declaration at home that night, memories of the wicked realities I had witnessed and experienced in the past crowded on my mind at once. I wrote it word after word as told by Sun Ho, expressing sorrow, bitter anguish and resentment.

I completed the declaration when the sky was turning grey in the east. I touched on all essential points and concluded it in these words:

“Justice is sure to win and injustice sure to fall. We must be courageous for justice and live for the future. Let us know and restore our self.”

I quoted these words from the lecture of Prof. Cho Un Song.

As I read the completed declaration, I felt as if I was seeing the demonstrators surging past in a stream before my eyes.

I revised and completed the declaration after inviting the opinions of Sun Ho and Chol Min.

When the day broke, I went to the university in a hurry. The lectures at an end, the students gathered around the garden of the university. They poured out from different lanes as if by a promise. In a moment, well above 1,000 students got together.

I sensed that they were acting on a unified direction. The students' demonstration on the campus was violent from the beginning. The students swaying like the raging seas sang the alma mater song and the song of freedom.

A student who seemed to be a senior appeared



suddenly and read out the declaration through the megaphone.

"Fellow students, let's rally. To the plaza of democracy and independence! Brothers in chains, display a burning love of the country and the people and resolutely come forward..."

The declaration was punctuated many times by enthusiastic applauses of the students from the beginning. The demonstrators shouted slogans in succession.

"Let's defend our democratic campus to the last!"

"Reinstate the conscientious professors!"

"Stop clampdown on the campus!"

"Stop forced enlistment!"

"University is no place for profiteering. Punish vampires on the campus!"

"We are opposed to comprador enterprises and vicious entrepreneurs."

The slogans shouted by the students all reflected our thoughts. The campus was like a raging sea. The students marched in procession round the university shoulder to shoulder. Policemen came rushing to the scene. The students' spirits rose higher although the policemen blocked their way, wielding truncheons. Suddenly a girl student climbed to the roof of the university noticeboard and, scattering handbills, shouted, "Chun Doo Hwan, step down!" Brandishing a gasoline-filled fire bottle, she cried menacingly:

"Come closer and you and I are dead persons."

I saw her high fighting spirits.

Sun I who was watching the scene beside me excitedly clapped her hands. Someone started singing one of the ten songs popular among the people. Others



followed suit and sang it in chorus. The song *Chun Doo Hwan: I Am Happy* which was placed first among ten popular songs rang out. It was a humorous song jeering at Chun Doo Hwan who jumped up to presidency at one bound from the post of army security commander, regarding him as the singer. After a while the song *Soon Ja, Open the Door* which won eighth place among the ten popular songs was sung. Soon Ja is a name quite common to the waitresses of the public houses. Hinting at this, the song scorned at Chun Doo Hwan and his wife Li Soon Ja.

The spirits of the students were sky-high. The column of demonstrators pressed on the central streets. It was a grand march of youth aspiring after democracy, independence and justice. They held silent demonstration for a while.

The police was reinforced, and police chemical cars arrived. As things took such a turn, two white streamers were unfurled at the head of the column. They had the inscriptions, "Chun government, leave the scene!" "US troops and Japanese villains, go home!" The demonstrators were now bringing up acute political issues, and crying out for democracy and independence. The song calling for independence rang out again from among the demonstrators.

*In this land where the Japanese and Yankees  
lord it over  
Our brothers are harassed by compradors and  
fascists.  
Let us go breaking through the darkness.  
We will win back our things by ourselves.  
When we are ready to fight for democracy,*



*We are not afraid of fascist moves.  
We may be weak severally.  
But we shall grow strong amidst the struggle.  
Down with Chun Doo Hwan. (repeated three  
times)*

I thought a great deal while hearing the students' slogans and songs. How high-toned the slogans they were putting up were! They were even more high-pitched than the declaration I had written without sleeping at night. I felt I was far behind the students in the fighting spirit. The demonstrators surging forward like angry waves kept shouting, "Yankees, go home. Chun government, no!"

Gray-haired professors including Cho Un Song were seen in the rear of the column. It was obvious that they joined the students in their struggle. As the column of demonstrators reached the Kwanghwamun crossroads, the police chemical cars threw out tear shells. The students began to counter them with stone throwing. They picked up stones in the streets and threw them. When they ran short of stones, they ran this way and that for them. Then an old man who kept a small street stall climbed a ladder to the low roof of his shop and threw down roof tiles.

Roof tiles fell to the ground and broke. Sun Ho who was nearby picked up pieces of broken tiles and bowed to the old man, saying:

"Thank you, grandfather."

"Don't mention it. Throw them to the cops. My son died fighting like you during the April 19 event. I am weak and cannot fight. Throw them with all your strength on my behalf."







He was really a good old man. I saw the sentiments of truth-loving common people in his words. I looked at the grandfather with a lump in my throat.

The sun began to go down in the west. The column of demonstrators was stalled. The wounded students were evacuated without delay. Sun I and other girl students formed a relief squad and carried the wounded to somewhere by car. Scores of students were caught by police and carried away on police cars. We shouted our demand to release the seized students. We went over to a sit-down.

Quite a long time passed and we began to feel hungry, when a woman brought bread and milk to the demonstrators. Where there were righteous young people, there always was warm support. She kept a bread stall on a street and earned some money to eke out a living. She brought all the bread and milk she had, which she handed out ungrudgingly to the students. She was an admirable woman. She reminded me of my mother. If my mother saw me standing on this street, she would also give out all she had, I thought. This thought greatly encouraged me. Similar scenes took place at many places.

Sun Ho came to me and said:

“Yong Son, please come forward and read the declaration you wrote last night. Fresh cheers should be given to demonstrators.”

“I?”

“Yes. Hurry up. They are now tired, and so the declaration should be read, songs sung and slogans shouted.”

My heart thumped. I had no experience of making an agitation speech before my friends. True, I had mounted



the rostrum and aired my views on the themes of study many times. But I had never read a declaration during demonstration struggles on the streets. Now I had no time to lose shilly-shallying. With the megaphone given by Sun Ho, I stepped forward and read the declaration in front of the students who were sitting. Although the declaration and the solgans put forward in it were not very high-toned, they were met by hearty applause.

The spirits of the demonstrators rose high again. At the thought that the declaration I read instilled fresh vigour into them, my heart thumped and swelled with pride.

When dusk fell, the police who were waiting for a chance descended upon the demonstrators with reinforcements. They sought to disperse the students on a sit-down.

The police assailed the students mercilessly wielding the truncheons, and hauled off all they could lay hands on. The police outrages reached their height. They ran riot capturing the students indiscriminately.

I was also captured and hauled off. I kicked and struggled to break loose, but was overpowered by them. Large numbers of students were arrested like me. To our regret, the demonstration ended in this way.

## **Prison Diary**

The curtain fell on the days of my pursuit of knowledge under difficulties and my prison life began.

Prison life was a valuable experience for me. I could not spend the days idly in prison which was called the "university behind bars". I decided to keep my prison



diary. Who knows that it may afford reminiscence and supply nutrients for my life in later years?

May 8

Locked up behind bars in this moonlit night, my ears ring with the thunderous shouts for liberty raised on the campus and in Kwanghwamun Street like an eternal echo.

I wonder where Sun Ho who rushed about to encourage the demonstrators now is, and what has become of Il Su who marched forward carrying the streamer.

I wonder whether Miss Sun I and many other girl students who moved about quickly like swallows to nurse and take the wounded students to hospital are now sitting in the auditorium, missing their lost friends.

The images of the upright grandfather who threw down tiles from the roof and the kind mother who handed out bread and milk to us keep floating before my eyes.

The university must have been occupied by police or army men because of the demonstration. My feeling is somehow different from when I was caught and detained in the police station for several days. I feel proud and strong.

May 9

Of the over 50 students taken to the police station, 20 students or so were left aside, and the others were sentenced to seven days' detention and a fixed amount of fine. Anyway these students were considered "passive elements" and treated as lesser offenders. I was among the rest, the prime movers. It was probably



because I read the declaration. The police correctly picked out the prime movers with the help of the secret informers on the campus. I saw a senior student sitting in a corner of the detention room, and he was undoubtedly Mr. Yun Chol Min. He was in charge of the ideological circle Koryo Association. Who could be the villain who informed against him? I remembered meeting him first at a gathering of the circle and having a talk with him. Chol Min greeted me with his eyes in a dignified attitude. It was a greeting with many implications. I wanted to go and have a good talk with him, but refrained, because I was aware of dangerous atmosphere in the police station.

May 11

Today I was interrogated. A police officer with his glasses perched on the bridge of his nose questioned me brusquely.

"Your name's Yong Son, eh?"

"Yes."

"I'm pressed for time. I'll be brief. Who wrote the inflammatory declaration you read?"

"I wrote," answered I. It was a fact.

"Who told you to write it?"

I was at a loss for an answer for a moment. To write the declaration was the first assignment Sun Ho gave me.

I had contributed many articles expressing my views on social affairs to the university newspaper *Pyol* (star), which caused a sensation. So, my friends counted me among good writers.

I think that was why I was assigned to the task of writing an inflammatory declaration. But it was out of







the question to tell the name of Sun Ho. The interrogator demanded:

"Did you write it on your own account or on the instructions of someone?"

"I wrote it on my own account."

"You're telling a lie, you bloke. I know all about you. You, a hard student, and what on earth suddenly put it into your head to agitate for demonstration?"

He spoke the truth. I had been interested only in study. How comes it that he knows me so well? Small wonder since there were secret informers among the students. But I feigned ignorance and replied:

"I don't lie. I didn't write to agitate for demonstration. I only wrote and told what I saw and thought."

"How then did you get to know before writing the declaration that there would be a demonstration?"

"I got to know about it at lunchtime. As you know, in our university demonstrations take place like annual functions. Students were gathering on the campus at lunchtime, as I sensed it by intuition."

"By intuition?"

"Right. Where there are students, there will always be a demonstration. I heard say in the police station that demonstration is a sort of 'contagious disease' on the campuses."

"Contagious disease!"

"Yes."

"Well. Then what is it you claimed in your declaration?" He was now trying to pry into the matter. I did not think what I wrote in the declaration would make a big trouble and so replied without hesitation.

"I insisted that democracy and justice must be defended by all means. I called for the retraction of the



dismissal of prominent professors and denounced commercialization of campuses. Even now I think I'm right."

"Isn't it your pet slogan to defend democracy and justice?"

"It's become a credo for all of us university students."

"Credo?"

"Yes. A campus without democracy and justice is inconceivable, isn't it?"

"And didn't you think that it stirred the leftist students who turned against the government?"

"That depends on how each of them accepts it."

The police officer almost shouted in irritation:

"Why the devil did you come forward and read an inflammatory declaration when the others sat silently, you son of a bitch? I'll give you a ten-year jail sentence."

I remained silent, for if I retorted, it would aggravate his temper.

He kept pressing me to tell who was the first to shout the slogan, "US troops, go home!" I did not know. I answered I did not know.

"Well. Then you mean you have no wire-puller behind you, do you?" The interrogator fumed with anger.

I insisted that I had no one behind me. How could I betray the names of such fine friends of mine? No, never can I.

May 12

The interrogation continued. I kept shaking my head to the question as to who had wirepulled behind me. I was beaten black and blue. The young people of this land were destined to be beaten for advocating justice. I protested, and got a rain of blows again for it. Bruised all over, I returned to the cell.



May 17

A slip in cipher was sent in from outside. Chol Min told at this. It encouraged us to fight on unyieldingly remaining faithful to our principles and said that the friends in the university launched a campaign for the release of the detained students every day. They were waging a struggle by protests, sit-downs, petitions and what not. They were really good friends! I felt as if my whole body was protected by the warm breath of Sun Ho, Il Su, Sun I and many other passionate students. I did not feel lonely and forlorn.

May 27

The interrogation ended. Today I was tried with closed doors. A professor undertook free defence for me. The judiciary was on the side of the powers that be. Even coherent pleading and defence, however logical, counted for little in court. The powerless are only objects of punishment.

At last I was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and suspension of attendance at university for an indefinite period. Over ten students got the same sentences with me. Mr. Chol Min was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. Things were black before my eyes.

Mr. Chol Min said to me with a grin:

"Yong Son, we got off lightly. We owe this to the students' struggle for our release. But for their struggle, we should have got two or three years' prison term.

"Better finish the university course in prison. I mean university behind bars. Here we can have character-building as humans. Higher learning is not necessarily confined to university, is it? From now on we are students of prison university."



Mr. Chol Min crooned the alma mater song to himself. I envy him his noble moral level. The vistas of my future which looked dark seem to brighten up. His life philosophy serves as a staff for me.

June 2

We were sent to Z prison. I would not sleep a wink all through the night. It is hot in June. But in the concrete cell of the prison I could escape the sultry heat if only for a short while.

It is moonlight. Why cannot I fall asleep? I am keenly homesick. How is sick father feeling and what is mother doing now? I wonder if they hear from younger sister Yong Ok who has been sold off to Brazil.

As I am thinking of home, sad thoughts come over me, but, on the other hand, I feel the better for the imprisonment. It may be rather better not to see the sad plight of my family's livelihood. Is this a kind of escape from reality?

My thoughts run on the A-frame carrier and the cart which were associated with my dream of working my way through university. Thought flies to everything because it has awfully large wings. Should I abandon my dream of university education for ever? Even behind bars I must spare my time and read something, think and write.

Prof. Cho Un Song's remark, "Let us know and recover ourself?" occurs to me. Yes. I must be myself everywhere!

June 29

I heard the door of the cell being opened.

"No. 185, wanted for an interview."

I am No. 185. I went to the interview room and saw



mother waiting for me. Miss Sun I was also there. The moment I saw mother tears welled up in my eyes, but I had to hold back tears in front of her. Her face was emaciated. She looked older. Sun I smiled with joy the moment she saw me, but it seemed she could not help tears coming to her gem-like eyes.

When I asked after sick father, mother said that his conditions had not changed.

"Don't worry about home but take good care of yourself. Only when you return home safe and healthy, will your father recover his health."

Caressing my hands, mother hardly held back her tears.

Is there a word with so strong an appeal as the word mother? A mother symbolizes fortitude to her son. I said:

"Mother, pardon me. I failed in my filial duty..."

"What a thing to say! I don't blame you. I shall be glad if only you remain healthy. Don't worry about home. Sun I and your classmates collected money and brought it to me."

I am grateful to my classmates. They are badly off themselves, but are looking after my home. Sun I came up and said:

"Mr. Yong Son, please bear your mother's words in mind. My father, too, is worried about you. You must be careful of your health. My father said justice will win. In this bundle are textbooks and letters...."

Sensitive Sun I lowered her head, unable to conclude her words.

"Time!" shouted the guard and the iron door closed putting an end to our interview.

"Yong Son dear!"

"Mr. Yong Son!"



“Mother! Miss Sun II!”

Our plaintive calls to each other were obstructed by the iron door.

Our interview came to an end.

On return to my cell, I untied the bundle and found clean shirts and bread in it. I felt a lump in my throat.

There were letters, too. Opening the first envelope, I found touching lines from my classmates. They all entered a few words under a pseudonym or nickname. They said:

Mr. Doctor (my nickname), health first. Your friend Tiger of Anam-dong;

You stand like a statue on the tower of justice. Angler on the Han River;

Love your elder brother (meaning Mr. Chol Min). Melody of the Koryo Association;

You’ve found yourself. The Pine Tree on Mt. Samgak;  
I stand by you. Arirang;

I mean you and you mean me. I live in your home. Mt. Samgak;

Twenty-five hard blows on Chang Sol with a clenched fist. Forward No. 5;

You live in the future. Pigeon;

Please smile, grow stout. The Crescent Eyebrows;

The strong and the weak. We saw a strong man. Wrestler;

I present you with portrait of Prometheus. Motorbike;

Your desk is vacant, but your image is there. Skate on Sejong Street;

Ring out the tune of the alma mater song. Spectacles;

The clock ticks on correctly. Echo;

You’re an exuberant blossom in the flower garden of liberty. Daisy;



Pen + conscience + fortitude – submission –  
vanity. Parrot;

I love red flowers. Lark.

On close study, the implications of these lines were profound. Reading these messages, I seemed to see the endearing faces of the classmates doubling over the lines. I am grateful to them for encouraging me and picturing a bright future for me, I bear their meaningful words deep in mind. I seem to feel my friends' pulses with my whole heart.

I opened the second envelope. Miss Sun I's familiar hand struck my eyes. It runs as follows:

"Mr. Yong Son, your name is so dear to me that I want to keep calling it. Broad vistas are bound to open to a man with a high aim.

"I like the intellects who go with the times. I despise bluff, hypocrisy and vanity. I hope you will be a strong man commanding love and sympathy of people.

"Don't worry about your mother. We are here looking after her. I had a lot to speak to you before, but I couldn't. Today, too, there are many things I want to say to you, but I'll keep them back.

"Please don't forget that your friends are always standing by your side. Our classmates have decided to have a grand banquet at the Haksa Teahouse on the day of your release.

"I will keep in the depths of my mind what I wanted to say to you. Please take good care of yourself.

"I want to call your name again, Mr. Yong Son."

It is a letter full of warmth. Sun I is a really kind girl student. I did not know Sun I cared so much for me. I was a heartless man.



July 10

With the sounding of the reveille, a search of the prison cells started. The senior and other prison guards examined our thumbprints and handwritings. The fact was that bills were handed round. I remembered the bill I saw three days before. It read:

“Comrades in prison, don’t yield. Let us hold out with a smile. Let us unite without yielding. Those who are seduced to change their colours will meet with death. Imprisoned Comrades Association.”

Reading it, I thought that it was the wording of a staunch fighter. I wanted to see the unknown champion.

The jailers failed to find out whose handwriting it was. In a fit of anger, they put us to heavy labour. The atmosphere in the prison is touchy.

July 19

I met Mr. Chol Min on the passage on my way back from the medical room.

He patted me. He told me to take care not to fall ill. He informed me of university news. He took a loaf of bread out of his trouser pocket and gave it to me. He said:

“You are hungry, aren’t you? Eat this and cheer up. Let us meet after our release and achieve our aim. Truth, future and victory belong to us!”

On the approach of a jailer, he squeezed my hand and then, letting go of it, went away.

Each time we met, he encouraged me. Although he is in fetters, no chains can fetter his will. How gratifying it is that the Koryo Association is on the move although he is behind bars! From today I am not allowed to write my diary. The jailers yelled that it was forbidden to write in



the cells. It was made known that the prison terms would be extended for months for writing anything. The stub of my pencil has been worn out and papers run out. The guards took away all the books and pencils from among the things sent into us from outside. I have no choice but to keep a mental diary.

## **“Pigeongram”**

This is an oppressive land where there are human beings but there is no human right, where there is the people but they have no national dignity.

People ironically liken this land to a “land without air, light and soul”.

South Korea really is a hell on earth and a prison without roof. It is no exaggeration that people say that although they are living at their home, they have one of their legs in the prison.

In prison I found people who have the record of serving prison terms as many as eight times, and others, five, three or two times.

Many of them have served their terms of imprisonment together and are intimate with each other. Those who served their terms in the same cell or next cell are called “cell mates”. The “cell mates” are not only friends in prison but also become close associates after their release. This is a fact. With the approach of their release from prison at the expiration of their terms they become more intimate and talk about their prospects after their release. When parting from each other, they usually exchange their parting words and say, for example, “I live in S-dong and go to the R teahouse often. If you



come that way, come to see me.”

It is not easy for people who have been convicted to get a job after their release. Cell mates either happen to meet with each other while going about in quest of a job, or make visits to kill time. When they meet, they are delighted, but, at the same time, they pour out their discontent against society because they find it hard to eke out a living.

As friendship formed in adversity is true friendship, friends who come into close association behind bars are real friends who will share joy and sorrow with each other. When they suffer unbearable distress on the road of life, they help each other, and when they are in sorrow, they console each other. Even in the desolate ruin of humanity where people are living in isolation, cheating and making a prey of others, the cell mates grudge nothing between them.

The fragrance of humanity born among the poor who have gone through hardships is really pleasing.

Bad people do so much as call the south Korean prisons schools of crime. The prisons are so called because the cell mates who meet casually in prison often rack their brains together and arrange for “another crime” rather than repenting their past “mistakes” and forming a project to turn over a “clean” new leaf after their release. With an increase in their criminal records, their “criminal brains” develop further and their “criminal plots” become more elaborate. When the cell mates meet or come together, something beyond the imagination of ordinary people often takes place.

I cannot bypass a story I heard and saw behind bars. It is about the “pigeongram.”

Even in prison moneyed persons can do anything and



the moneyless have to suffer all sorts of miseries. Therefore it is said in the town that "a man with money will be found not guilty and a man with no money will be given the verdict of guilty." Even in prison money can work all kinds of wonders. This gave birth to the "pigeongram" in south Korean prison. This means sending jailers on errands by tipping them.

One day a prisoner badly wanted to have a smoke. But no cigarette could be obtained in prison.

"O, that I could have a puff!"

"Cigarette?" a cell mate sitting by him asked with a sympathetic glance at him. His name was Pak Chil Bom.

"Yes, cigarette. How nice it would be if I had a *Unhasu* cigarette! If I took a puff at an *Unhasu* cigarette when I get homesick, I should be intoxicated. Oh I yearn after an *Unhasu* cigarette!" He trailed his last words in a funny way. *Unhasu* was a kind of good cigarette.

"If you want *Unhasu* cigarettes, send a 'pigeongram'."

"It needs money."

"I have some money."

"Have you?" a middle-aged man said, pleased.

There were many routes for prisoners to get cigarettes. The most ordinary way was to send a "pigeon", that is a jail guard on the errand.

The prisoner Pak Chil Bom who had some money about him waved to the guard pacing the corridor beyond the iron bars and addressed him, "Mr. Guard."

"What's the matter?"

"I have a favour to ask of you."

"What's that?"

Pak Chil Bom winked, giving a hint. He gave the guard a folded slip of paper. The man turned back and read it.



"Mr. Guard, I beg you to get a pack of *Unhasu* cigarette for me. I'm so thirsty for a smoke that I'm almost becoming insane. I'll give you 3,000 *won* in token of my thanks. No. 103." This was his number. 3,000 *won* of money was wrapped in the paper.

The guard crumpled up the slip and, turning round, bluntly said, "No, I say!"

This meant that the reward was too small.

"Well, I will add two to it, I promise you."

Showing his two extended fingers, Pak Chil Bom winked his promise. He meant he would give 2,000 *won* more. Only then did the guard blink his eyes and disappeared somewhere. It seemed he was satisfied to some extent now.

Several cigarettes would be obtained for 2,000-3,000 *won*, and sometimes tens or hundreds of thousands *won* would be a pack of cigarettes.

Those who have money can send 'pigeongrams' like this.

In prison prisoners are not allowed to have cash about them. Those who have money have to deposit it with the prison authorities and draw it when needed. But it is troublesome to go through this procedure, so they usually keep it hidden in the upper hems of the prisoner's trousers and take out when they want to use it.

As you see, it is not difficult to have a smoke in prison. When a dog gets a bone, it seeks a recess to pick it out of reach from other dogs. Just as this, prisoners have a smoke in the corner of the prison cell. In this sense they call cigarette "dog" among themselves.

When they puff away cigarette smoke in the corner of the cell, facing the wall, it spreads along the wall. So it is



hardly noticeable to the prison guards. If only they have money they can drink wine even in prison. Those who have a large sum of money deposited with the prison authorities can have wine by sending a "pigeongram".

This is a story which can be heard only in south Korea covered with prisons.

Cell mates are found everywhere and around prisons and give rise to various fantastic stories, and things beyond all imagination take place behind bars through "pigeongrams" to surprise people.

Whenever I heard such stories from my cell mates, I thought to myself:

"This land as a whole is a prison and our people are all prisoners. I wonder when the dreadful night will recede and a bright morning will dawn on this dark hell where people are kept behind bars. Oh, I long for a blue sky of freedom and a land of justice where human rights prosper and the fragrance of lofty personality pervades! How I long for it!"

Whenever this thought filled my mind, I would chant a verse in my mind in spite of myself:

....

*Lives may be abandoned,  
But freedom cannot be abandoned.*

*I hate prison.  
I'm really averse to slavery.  
I like the blue sky.  
I really like to be a free man.*



## **Among the People of the “Garbage Republic”**

Grim days passed by. Time flew and an end came to prison life. My friends rejoiced at my release. I was glad.

The university authorities struck off my name from the list. They said it was a step taken on instructions from the Ministry of Education. Prof. Cho Un Song and my friends used their influence in my favour, but it was no use. With a grim determination, I gave up university. Needless to say, my mother was very sad. My father's conditions worsened.

I decided not to receive help from Sun I and my friends any more. I resolved to go into society and find employment. But nobody wanted to employ my cheap labour for the reason of my prison records. People who roam in search of a job are often called “vagabond lives”. I wandered in search of employment, staying here for one day and there for two days like a migratory bird.

When I returned to my poor house with a low eave, I was pained beyond description to see my pitiable family who were barely eking out their living. Father was now unable to move. Mother was hawking bean curd to raise money for buying medicine for my ailing father, but because of bad times she would often lose and run into debt.

The groans of my sick father and the weary sighs of my mother rent my heart and made it unbearable for me to stay at home. How relentless the fate was! I stood up to the hard fate with clenched teeth and ran out of my



house in quest of a job. I got a job at an ironworks thanks to the good offices of Pak Il Su's father.

With a hungry stomach, I had to heat iron plates and wield sledge hammer, sweating all day long. Hot flames, red-hot iron plates, the heavy hammer, and pouring perspirations may be symbolic of the ironworker.

For all this heat-affected backbreaking work, I was poorly paid. But I had to earn money, either one penny or twopence.

Whenever the image of my poor father on the last leg of his life and the tear-stained face of my mother occurred to me, I struck the iron plate with the hammer with clenched teeth.

"I must work a little more and earn some more money," thought I to myself and did even overtime night work.

When I received the fifth pay, the owner of the ironworks came to me and said as if doing a kindness for me:

"Yong Son, I think you needn't brood over your little money. Better join the loan club.

"If you join the loan club, you can multiply your funds and draw your deposit in a lump sum when necessary. When you want to make money, you must use your brains. Your brains, I say."

His suggestion sounded reasonable. I wanted to increase my funds and draw out a lump sum for use from the loan club. I was so naive. I joined the loan club, believing what he said. I put all the money I earned in the loan club. I cherished a swelling hope to draw out my deposit in a lump some day and buy good medicine for my father.

As my deposit in the loan club increased, though a



small sum, I was comforted by the thought of the growing funds. But a most scandalous thing happened. When about one month was left before my time for drawing out the deposited money, the man in charge of the deposits absconded with all the money entrusted to him. At the news I plumped down on the ground. I felt as if the earth sank and the sky fell. All my hope was blasted overnight.

The emaciated face of my father waiting for medicine and the thin figure of my mother worn out by household cares and looking so old for her age continued to float before my eyes, and I could not calm down my agitation.

Thinking of the matter, I became angry with the owner of the ironworks who cajoled me into joining the loan club. I sprang up to my feet and went to him. I entreated in an almost servile manner:

"Take back my money from the loan club. My father is dying."

"Your money in the loan club? What have I to do with it? Your money has been carried off by another man and you are asking me for it, eh? Hum, I don't know about your money."

"Why, you told me to join the loan club. And now you say you don't know about it. Is that a right thing to do?"

"Is there anything I can do about it? Now that the fellow has run away with the money...."

"But how can you sit by with folded arms? I'm not the only victim. The money should be taken back by reporting to the police or by any other means, shouldn't it?"

"I don't know. Don't argue, but get out."

The owner of the ironworks shouted angrily, his face flushed like a carrot. He apparently conspired with



absconder. Otherwise, how could he leave alone the man who had run away with a large sum of money? I kept charging him.

This was how I displeased him, and I was fired from the ironworks. Enraged at this, I went to his office and overturned his desk and broke windowpanes by way of revenge. Even that did not satisfy me. This was a sorrow allotted to the people of the lowest classes who had no money nor power.

I was again out of employment. I was nagged by hunger. I was so hungry that I could not walk well. Nevertheless I could not return home and give mother cause of sigh.

My clothes were worn out. I chose the work of ragpicking which did not require funds. In other words, I became a ragman.

What a miserable sight I must have presented as I was rummaging rubbish dumps with a rag box on my back. How deplorable it was that I, the best student at university, was picking rags! I felt deeply ashamed. I feared being seen by my classmates. I picked rags with my head lowered lest they might see me as they happened to pass by.

However, even ragpicking could not be done freely in south Korea. Every garbage pit had its owner, and the dumped rubbish had its owner. The right to collect it was sold at hundreds of thousand *won*. I was penniless and could not buy the "right" to pick rags. Barehanded, I had no "right" to do anything.

I was forced out of rubbish dumps. However, I dared to rummage a dumping ground. One day when I was picking rags in the refuse pit, a middle-aged man came up and said gently:



"Hey, you poor friend. This rubbish dump has its owner. Go to other places to pick rags. There is little difference between us in our circumstances, but allow for our reasons."

Ragmen seemed to have formed some sort of "association". The man seemed to be the head of the poor ragmen's association. Snotty-nosed children around him were picking and sorting out rags under his direction. I entreated him: "Please. Allow me to pick rags today at least. I have been cheated out of all the money I had earned at an ironworks. I have a sick father at home. I have got no other recourse. I beg you to permit me to pick rags here, I'll go halves with you."

My entreaty seemed to have moved the man. The small boys who were members of the "ragmen's association" asked him to allow me to pick rags as I was a poor man like them, and he consented.

"Your family circumstances seem piteous. You needn't divide your pick half and half but take it all to yourself."

It was very kind of him. People of the "rubbish republic" were really generous. Sympathy was born of the poor after all. The poor understand and share the sufferings of their like. I felt boundlessly happy. I consoled myself with the thought that there were kind and generous people in this thief-ridden Seoul.

After rummaging through the rubbish dump a young man in his thirties picked up and smoked a stub of cigarette. He said to another man:

"Recently they are said to have a headache in the Blue House. It is said that various letters are sent and phone calls are made to the 'grievance window' of the Blue House."



"I've also heard that."

They exchanged interesting remarks. I lent an attentive ear to their talk. They said a letter was sent to the "grievance window" of the Blue House, which read:

"Master of the Blue House, listen. We common people are starving. Every day they are beaten to near death.

"We'll replace the President. We'll upturn the President and the National Assembly and the fields and all.

Paek Song Min"

Once there was a phone call which declared:

"What kind of President are you to have reduced the country to this plight?

"Bring 250 million *won* to the entrance to the Changgyong Palace Grounds for the relief of us the unemployed within three days, or you shall be a dead man within five days.

On behalf of the Hangang  
Association of the Unemployed"

Another letter read:

"Bring to us the bribes you intend to present to the Yankees. Otherwise, we will blow up the Blue House. Go quickly to the Suyuri cemetery. Syngman Rhee is calling you from hell...."

Their talk was interesting. They were in wornout clothes, but they had incomparably clean and upright minds.

When tens of ragmen were talking in high exultation, a spectacled man in jumper came forward and made an important remark. He said:

"Well, ragmen assembled here in this rubbish dump!



As was said just now, our popular feeling is to overthrow the President in that Blue House, ministers, deputy ministers and all privileged."

"That's right," a young man in his twenties who seemed to have given up university chimed in. "We want rice and freedom and reunification."

Then the spectacled man became still more elated and said with his arms akimbo, articulating distinctly:

"Now, what about forming a republic formally with ragmen?"

"Yes, certainly," all answered in chorus.

"Then I proclaim here today the founding of a 'garbage republic'.

"The garbage republic' is a republic in the interests of all the poverty-stricken, humiliated ragmen like ourselves. From now on the citizens of the 'garbage republic' are members of one family who pick rags united as one.

"The day will surely come when our republic throws away rags and becomes a republic of happy popular masses."

A vociferous applause broke forth from among the ragmen. The man's speech was truly encouraging.

From now I am also a citizen of the "garbage republic," I thought to myself. Although my living prospects were gloomy and I was hungry, that was one of the rare days when I felt so pleased and refreshed. The ragmen were full of hope for a bright future like this in spite of their hard life.

The forsaken people of the lowest classes in this land entertained a burning love for their future. Their hearts were blazing with hatred and indignation against this society of evils.



## 6. The Drift of Public Sentiment

Water flows even in the icebound river. Even if fascist tyranny turns this land into the tundra, the public sentiment rages under its glacier.

The sense of resistance to evil-ridden world and the yearning after a new real world converge into a stream of public sentiment.

### Recruited under Other's Name

Fate was heartless. The call-up paper shadowed me, a ragman who roamed dumping grounds in Seoul.

I wonder whether fate can be likened to the whirlwind making sport of man. The fate suddenly chained me to conscription when I came of draft age.

One day I earned a few pence by picking rags and returned home exhausted to find call-up paper waiting for me at home.

Mother was sorrowfully weeping, holding in her hand the call-up paper for me, her only support.

Not knowing about this, I anxiously asked, fearing that there was another misfortune.

"Mother, what's the matter?"

"You are called up for the army. If you join the army how can we get on? Alas, what a cruel world." Mother sighed, drying her eyes.



I felt as if my heart was rent. If I enter the army who will look after my sick father and who will help mother?

A thousand anxieties weighed on me, but I could not merely weep. I wanted to appeal to the office concerned to make allowance for my family circumstances.

I did not dare to lay my case before the military affairs office in Seoul. I petitioned the official in charge of conscription of the office of the village where I lived.

"...Please reconsider my enrollment, making allowances for my family circumstances.

"It defies description. If I join the army my father will die of a disease and my mother will starve.

"Please take pity on my family, and exempt me from conscription. Please let me take service as a home guard. Conscription, too, is done by man, isn't it?

"Please let me put off my military service for one year, if it is obligatory. Please let me cure my father and mother, and then join the army. Please have pity on me and help me."

I wrote in tiny lettering what pitiable plight my family was in.

However, it was like a thin voice calling for help on the vast expanse of the rough sea.

But the heartless world paid no heed to my appeal. I had no choice but to enter the army. I had to leave the tumbledown board-framed house in tears and with a sigh to throw myself into the military service, the jaw of death.

I was gloomy for days. One day I was visited by a village official in charge of conscription. He said he was sent by the military affairs office. He spoke to me kindly from the beginning.

I wondered if there was such a kind person in this ice-



cold world. To my surprise, he sat close to me and said:  
"Yong Son, I heard your family is suffering hardship.  
Is that so?"

"Certainly."

I replied absent-mindedly, but the next moment I was puzzled. It was strange that a stranger showed his sympathy for me putting his hand on my shoulder in this cruel heartless world.

I impatiently waited for his next words.

"It cannot be helped that you are called up. I suppose your family is in a pretty fix."





"Certainly. So I petitioned the village office in charge of conscription to allow for my family circumstances."

"I won't worry if petition will do. Anyway you must enter the army."

"Then what shall I do with my family?"

"That's why I came to see you. If possible, you had better catch two pigeons with one bean."

"What do you mean?"

I lent an attentive ear to him.

"If you are enlisted in the army instead of the son of the managing director of the S bank in Chongno Street you will perform military duties and earn money. It serves two ends, doesn't it?"

"??"

I gave him a dubious look. He looked out of the corner of his eye at me and went on:

"When one reaches twenty, one is duty bound to serve in the army. In our society military service may be likened to the measles one has to have in one's youth. So, if you serve in the army under the name of the son of the managing director, it is as good as undergoing military service for both at a time. How fine it is!

"Well, take one million *won* in advance. Now the managing director will look after your family."

He placed a thick wad of money on my lap as though doing me a favour.

How disgusting it is! I was told to enter the army for other. I felt as if I was hit by an iron bar in the back of my head. I felt faint. I felt my brain was muddled.

His sweet-sounding voice came to my ears.

"As the saying goes, if you choose at all, choose the better. Use your brains and you will make money while doing the same thing.



"Learning that your family was suffering hardships, I brought you such good luck. Mark my words and make up your mind." In short, he meant that I owed this good luck to his kind offices.

He apparently was a middleman. No doubt he took a big bribe for exempting the managing director's son from compulsory military service.

But, it can't be helped. It is common practice in this cursed world to deceive and to be deceived...

I pulled myself together and thought hard.

"What shall I do? I am to perform military service anyway. Shall I do it, taking money?...

"Then what shall I do with my call-up paper?"

So thinking, I asked him:

"I thank you for your offices, but I wonder what shall I do with my call-up paper?

"If I am enlisted in the army in the name of the managing director's son, mustn't I serve in the army twice?"

"Oh, don't worry in vain. I am an official in charge of conscription. I'll deal with it. Such as I am, I am capable of dealing with it without difficulty. In case you get hurt in training or fall ill serving in the army, you may soon return home. Man must use his brains..."

"... .."

I fell silent and thought hard.

The more I thought the more miserable I felt. That I shall serve in the army under other's name because I live in destitution, having no money!

Finding that I was at a loss he pressed me and, thrusting the call-up paper for the banker's son into my hand, he said:

"Well, take the call-up paper now. I'll deal with the



other matters in the office....

"Taking it that you have consented, I am going now. Don't worry about your family. When I have time I will drop in and get the banker informed of your family circumstances. He is as good as a millionaire. Supporting your family is nothing to him."

He patted me on the back and went away.

I felt as if I was hard hit on the back of my head.

After a while I glanced at the call-up paper he put in my hand. The name An U Gil caught my eyes.

Then should I go soldiering from now on by the name An U Gil, not by Kim Yong Son, the name given by the parents? In an instant I was overcome by sorrow and tears rolled down the cheeks unbidden. My bedridden sick father and careworn mother who looked older for her age also wept.

I was at a loss.

"Should I see Sun Ho, Il Su, Miss Sun I or Professor Un Song and discuss the matter? No. They can't help it either. I had better rather not meet them. My story will sadden them. I will not worry my friends any more. I will write them before my departure."

Thus thinking, I wrote letters to be sent to them all night.

This is how I entered the military service under the name of An U Gil.

I was summoned by the official in charge of conscription before long and sent to the military affairs office where I went through physical examination for conscription and was rated as B.

The moneyed men could be placed in reserve service which is easier than active service.

Those who slipped a wad of 500,000 *won* to the army



surgeon were placed in reserve service being rated as grade C in the physical examination. Those from rich families all took this course. But it was unthinkable for me.

I underwent four weeks' recruit training in the boot camp. The life in the boot camp was really trying.

In the boot camp recruits who were said to be given foremost treatment suffered most.

One day an officer in charge of troop information & education appeared and barked at us:

"You're soldiers in uniform. Army-men must obey orders whether they live or die. Understand?"

Their reply was poorly audible and he shouted again: "Understand?"

Yet, their reply was poorly audible.

Over sixty recruits remained silent, winking to each other like deaf-mutes.

The angry troop information & education officer barked again:

"You bastards, take the first disciplinary punishment. Lick the privy floor!"

It being the military order which one should obey even if one dies, we had to lick the dirty floor of the company privy. The dirty thing touching the tongue was more trying than good thrashing.

The first baptism of the heartless military service in which man is handled more mercilessly than the slaves of the ancient society was too harsh.

The rank and file pretended to obey order without any words, but from the beginning they felt the surge of anger.

That evening, back in the barrack, the recruits got together here and there, and murmured complaints.



It turned out that among the recruits there were quite a few of undergraduates and university graduates. Some of them took part in demonstrations held in campuses including those of Seoul and Koryo Universities.

"Hey, how can we bear this?! Isn't that they treat us like African bisons? What wrong have we done? God damn...."

"Let us spot the wicked officers who treat us like Indians, or savages. They shall pay for it one day."

"Is it admissible to let us lick the privy floor? How is it that such appalling punishment entered their minds? How dare they to inflict such barbaric punishment upon us young soldiers?"

"Let us make a written protest in the name of the recruits of the boot camp right away. Damn it. If they mete out another punishment of the kind to us I will finish off them all and desert."

They gave vent to their grudge.

I felt as they did. Although I did not put in a word, I felt an impulse to vent my indignation much stronger than theirs.

The night in the boot camp wore on. But the recruits who had undergone the bitter experience of army life for the first time could not fall asleep. Lying close side by side in the narrow barrack, they talked under their breath all night.

Their indignation was seeking an outlet from the first days of their army life. The night of agony and resentment was deepening, but morning was dawning on their minds.



## **General Assembly of “Food Stealers’ Party”**

Public sentiment cannot be bound with chains. Limbs and body can be chained, but how can the mind of people be bound?

So, someone said that mind is stronger than chains.

The fascist tyranny held sway over the country and the chains of oppression menaced the lives of people, but the popular masses aspired to live in a new democratic and reunified country where the idea of independence blooms.

I could see and feel the will of people everywhere.

The soldiers of the south Korean army had the feeling antipathic to forced subordination and a sense of self-protection. They pretended to obey the orders of their superiors on the surface but they had their own soul's life.

One day we carried out an offensive action in the simulated-atomic war on the hill T, called “UN forces height”, which was followed by the “endure-the-cold training”

“The endure-the-cold training” meant crossing an ice-cold river. On returning to the company barrack from the training, soldiers collapsed like frosted leaves. They had scarcely supped when they dropped off to sleep.

That night in the wake of the training I unluckily had to stand guard at the company mess hall.

Standing sentry in the dead of night, I felt very hungry.



Were I asleep, I would forget hunger. But standing sentry I felt terribly hungry.

The supper I had that evening was as much as a rice ball, and, on top of that, the soup was watery, which could be swallowed at a draft. There was nothing to chew in it.

It was noised abroad by the authorities that the south Korean army men were served with "liberal" meals. It meant that the soldiers eat as much as they like. This really was a whopping lie.

We were served with boiled rice and soup barely enough to keep ourselves alive. In a word, we were on the brink of starvation.

A chill came over me in the wake of hunger and the training.

I picked up straw bags scattered around and covered my body with them to warm up. Nobody would watch me in this night, so I had nothing to be ashamed of. I felt somewhat warm. Man seemed to have as many lives as a cat. Use your brain and you can do anything.

In the dim moonlight I looked at myself. I looked like a chimney of the thatched house in the rural village, my head resembling its top and my body, chimney body wrapped in straw bags to keep off the cold in winter.

"Chimney sentry" was in the mouth of the south Korean army men. There was some truth in it.

The words "chimney sentry" had long been in vogue since many senior soldiers had wrapped themselves in straw bags.

The night wore on and it was quiet all around. Crickets chirped at times.

Unexpectedly, I found four or five soldiers stealing up on me. Saucer-eyed, I watched them closely.



"If they are bad guys...? Or...."

I was seized with fear. I tightened my grip on the rifle and was about to blow a whistle. A soldier flew upon me from behind and held my arms tightly.

"U Gil, it's me, the boss of food stealers' party." Food stealers' party meant a gang of those who ate by stealth.

Looking behind me, I found Pfc. Choe. Beside him were private Ko, Pfc. Yun and Corporal Pak, grinning.

"You chimney sentry, can't you understand why we have come?"

Pfc. Choe sneered.

"What has brought you here at night? Why are you not sleeping?" I asked casting a dubious glance at them.

"Sleep comes when one's belly is full."

"So what?"

"Today you stand on guard at the mess hall, so we should eat by stealth."

"U Gil, are you not hungry? He is blockhead who goes hungry with food at hand.

"Hey, there's nothing to keep watch of. We are going to hold a meeting of the standing committee of food stealers' party in the mess hall. Keep guard over it."

Pfc. Choe winked at private Ko.

"If caught, you'll be severely punished," I remarked, saucer-eyed with fear when he said: "I wonder you, a member of the food stealers' party, have no guts. It's no crime. The divisional commander pilfers sacks of our rice every month under the name of 'rice for public use', or 'surplus food'".

The chap hailing from Kyongsang Province chimed in: "I heard that the regimental commander took away two sackfuls of rice, the battalion commander, one sackful."



Patting me on the back, Pfc. Choe added:

"The officers take away sackfuls of rice out of the soldiers' provisions and, on top of it, eat special meals in soldiers' canteen. That's why we are served with boiled barley and watery soup only.

"Therefore this evening we have to give a careful consideration to the grave situation facing us and take extraordinary measures."

However long I heard him, a humorist, I wasn't tired of it. I was listening to him absentmindedly.

Before I assented, others stole into the kitchen, took out rice and began to boil it on the stove.

My heart thumped. I feared that the patrol or an officer would drop in and see them. Then it would be all over with me, I thought. So I drew up to Pfc. Choe and warned him, saying "Be quick! Be quiet!" Pfc. Choe raised his hand to show that he understood me. Now I was good as in league with them.

Theirs really was soldiers' life. They must be terribly hungry when they, exhausted, eat greedily by stealth coming out at night without sleeping.

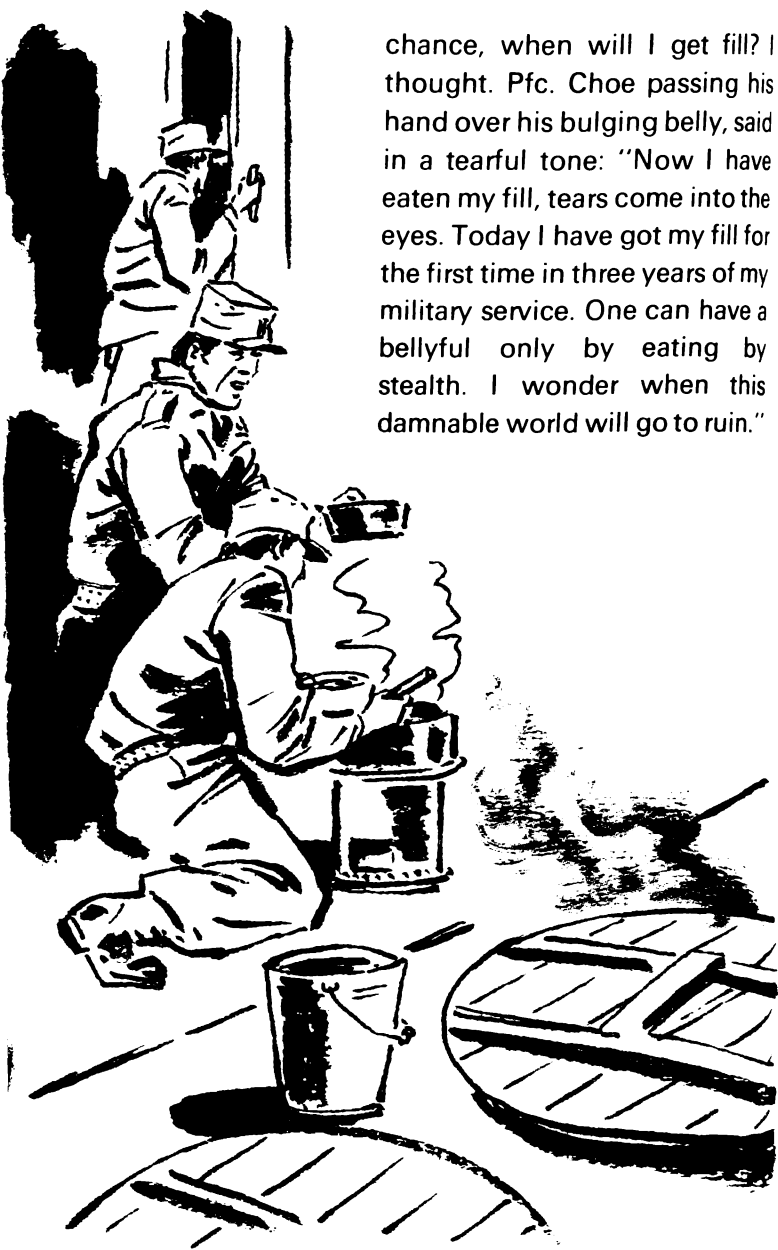
Food stealers' party! The name was wonderful. It was the name of the gang only found among the south Korean soldiers. It is unknown who thought up the name, but it was a fine name.

They hastily boiled rice and finished up several bowlfuls of boiled rice. Pfc. Choe made the chap from Kyongsang Province stand guard instead of me and took me into the kitchen, holding my hand. He told me to eat my bellyful.

I had plenty of boiled rice before me, but it seemed to me that it did not readily go down my throat. But I ate greedily. If I do not eat my bellyful when I have a good



chance, when will I get fill? I thought. Pfc. Choe passing his hand over his bulging belly, said in a tearful tone: "Now I have eaten my fill, tears come into the eyes. Today I have got my fill for the first time in three years of my military service. One can have a bellyful only by eating by stealth. I wonder when this damnable world will go to ruin."





Gazing at them, I thought:

"True, these fellows are the bosses of those who eat by stealth at night. I wonder whether they govern at night."

Having their bellyful, they had a chat. Pfc. Choe said:

"I suppose food stealers are not only in our platoon. Considering that there are so many in our platoon, there must be quite a few in the company, battalion and division and in the whole army. They must be in the general public, too."

"Certainly. They are said to surpass seven million at least."

Private Ko replied with the accent of Kyongsang Province.

Corporal Pak, too, unbosomed himself to them:

"They must be not only in the army but in the marine corps, the air force, nay, in the whole of the south Korean army. Hungry men are all candidates for food stealers' party. If the political parties vote at an election the food stealers' party will become the ruling party."

Pfc. Choe replied, smiling:

"Corporal Pak is right. If a secret ballot is held, our food stealers' party will defeat the puppet Democratic Justice Party and become the ruling party."

Private Ko chimed in:

"What about the name of food stealers' party? Doesn't it sound harsh to the ear as it is the party to be joined by hundreds and millions of hungry men? What do you say to changing its name?"

Pfc. Yun cut in:

"It is the most suitable name in this world of robbers.

"The party of the privileged who line their pockets



with public money in broad daylight is really the robbers' party. In other words, it is the party of those who are engaged in irregularities and corrupt practices on the plea of administering the affairs of state in this land. High livers are those who take advantage of and rob others. The Democratic Justice Party whose president is the master of the Blue House is the real robbers' party."

Pfc. Choe who was deep in meditation after a joke said in conclusion:

"With this view the political programme of our food stealers' party is to deliver soldiers and the common people from hunger.

"Now, let's go back for the ultimate goal of our party, deliverance from hunger."

They scattered like the wind.

Back to my post, I stood sentry, and thought:

"The south Korean army is rotten to the core. However the officers may threaten, the soliders do not mind.

"The platform of the food stealers' party is really excellent. Deliverance from hunger! What a nice platform!"

Recalling what they spoke at the general meeting of the food stealers' party, I laughed to myself. It was very pleasing in a sense.

## **"Anti-Communism" and Silla Restaurant**

The soldiers of the south Korean army passed days



beset with hardships in the out-of-the-way mountain recess.

Melancholic autumn came round. Leaves of trees which had been green and lush now put on autumnal tints and already began to fall in the occasional cold wind on the ridge.

Someone said that spring is the season of passion and autumn, the season for meditation. When I indulged in reverie treading on the fallen leaves, sadness came over me. So I thought that spring is the season of hope, while autumn is the season of sad despair.

My thoughts ran on my sick father and infirm mother, the sister who was sold out to Brazil and worries of life to come... .

Thousands of thoughts and worries weighed upon me, bringing intolerable sadness on me. I wanted to visit a village or Seoul, if possible, to divert my mind from sad thoughts.

One day I happened to accompany platoon leader to S town like a servant.

Choe Chang U, the platoon leader, was a graduate from the K university in Seoul. He was a spirited officer of about 30 and had a strong sense of justice.

While in university, he was suspended from it many times for his participation in demonstrations and once expelled from it. He was popular among his men for his great physical strength and good command of his platoon. He was warmhearted. He was sympathetic with his men in distress and tried to relieve them from hardships. So his men liked him. Even if he blamed them, it did not hurt them.

Accompanying my platoon leader, I entered S town which looked like the noisy Seoul in miniature.



"Anti-communist" slogans were seen everywhere in the street. Walls of bars, shops, banks and other places conspicuous to people's eyes were decked with slogans "Wipe out communism!" "Wipe out the north!" and "Oppose communism first!"

Even on the broken window pane of a low-eaved small store was seen the half-pasted bill reading "Wipe out the north!" fluttering in the wind.

The slogans "Oppose communism!" and "Oppose the north!" seen everywhere offended the eye.

These "anti-communist" slogans reminded me of the scene of army men going at a run at drill shouting "Wipe out communism!" and "Wipe out the north!"

Troop information & education officers' piercing shouts "Defeat the enemy at first stroke!" "Fly the national flag on the Amonk River!" seemed to ring afresh in my ears.

The whole of south Korea seemed to be blazoned with the placards and streamers bearing words "Oppose communism" and "Wipe out the north". As somebody said, south Korea seemed to be pervaded with "anti-communism" and inspired with "annihilation of communism".

These slogans puzzled me. I wondered how the brethren, the north Korean compatriots of the same stock can be regarded as enemy. This thought unusually weighed upon me that day when I walked along the street decked with "anti-communist" slogans.

One day I read a passage in newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo* that "anti-communism" had developed from the idealistic stage to that of ideology, and then to the stage of action.

That was right. In my high school and university days a day's routine began with and ended in "anti-



communism". "Anti-communism" was dinned into people's ears all day long. In a sense "anti-communism" was a sort of passport in this land.

Platoon Leader Choe muttered to himself, "Tut, tut! Anti-communism is all over."

In the street I felt hungry.

The platoon leader, too, seemed hungry.

Reaching an eating house bearing the sign "Silla Restaurant", the platoon leader called me.

"Hey, An U Gil, go into the eating house and see whether there are MPs."

Since I knew his mind, I saw whether they were there, and opening its door cautiously, and returned.

"Platoon Leader, there are none of them. It's shabby eating house..."

"Hey, come after me quietly."

He looked up and down the street before he entered the restaurant quickly.

It was a third-class restaurant.

Although he had not much money in his pocket he wanted to eat something warm and greasy.

When I stepped into the restaurant the smell of roasting meat excited my appetite.

As he told me I sat opposite him at a table. Though we waited for a while, the waitress did not appear.

After studying the platoon leader's face, I walked up to the menu board hung on the wall of the hall. There were some ten country people looking into the menu.

Among them was an old man bent with age who was watching the menu, straining his eyes.

At first glance it was apparent that he had come from a faraway rural village. His shabby appearance reminded



me of my sick father who must be groaning, confined to bed at home.

Picturing my father's image, I felt particular sympathy toward him. Even I felt like buying a plate of warm food for him, if I had money about me.

After reading the menu with difficulty, he was about to order a meal. It seemed that he wanted to have a nice meal while on a visit to the town. He said to the cashier, a middle-aged woman:

"Well, give me two bowlfuls of anti-communism."

She echoed him, looking at him with a puzzled glance.

"Two bowlfuls of anti-communism?"

"It is written large here."

"Anti-communism?"

"Yes, anti-communism," answered the old man in a reproachful tone as good as to say that the woman was asking an unnecessary thing. He pointed to the menu as though expecting sympathy from the people around him.

The platoon leader and I became interested in it and came up to him.

The old man was right. There was a list of dishes served such as "Silla scalloped soup", "arirang noodles", crude liquors and beside them was a plate bearing a large letter "anti-communism".

The old man who had no idea about "anti-communism" seemed to have taken it for the name of nice dish.

The people around him burst into laughter. The platoon leader and I followed suit. The waitress laughed a ringing laugh.

The old man was puzzled, so I hinted to him:



"Grandpa, 'anti-communism' is not the name of dish."

"Young man, what then does it mean? Why is it posted up there?"

"It means opposing communism, Grandad."

"Communism?"

"Yes, communism!"

"Then what is communism that the notice that they oppose it is posted up even in the eating house?"

I was not inclined to make further remark in front of my superior. The platoon leader said:

"Communism means the society in north Korea referred to by the authorities."

The platoon leader explained without restraint as he thought.

"The north?"

"Certainly. A government carried on in the north means communism."

He explained to the old man the way he thought.

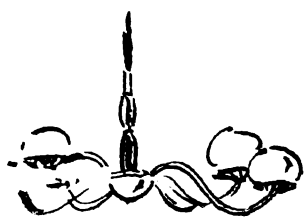
It was quiet around. The old man showed a great interest in the government in north Korea.

After glancing around, Platoon Leader Choe Chang U whispered in the old man's ears without scruple.

"By the communism of north Korea it is meant that all people are evenly well off. The land belongs to farmers. So there is no farm rent. It is said that there are no taxes nor irregularities and nothing is taken away from people. Everybody works and common people take part in government. Education and medical treatment are free, I hear. In short, it's an excellent land for the people."

The platoon leader spoke without hesitation. I never heard him speak ill of north Korea. Yet I was unaware





료리메뉴





that he so much longed for the wonderful land of north Korea.

"Well, if that is communism, none but fool will dislike it. My second son lives in the north. Then anti-communism means that I am at feud with my son, doesn't it?" said the old man, when the platoon leader whispered in his ear, making a megaphone of his hands.

"Grandad, north Korea is the earthly paradise where General Kim Il Sung respected by all administers the affairs of state."

"Certainly. I know General Kim Il Sung. During the war the General gave me land as well. How can I forget his favour?"

The old man got angry abruptly.

"Hey, you armyman, you are right. We are eking out a bare existence in this cursed world, but it is our life-long desire to live in such land. Tear off the plate right away," the old man said resentfully pointing his stick at it.

At this time the cashier came close to him and whispered.

"Hush, please, Grandad. Speak quietly. There are quite a few plainclothesmen and agents here. You may get in trouble.

"It matters little whether there is the plate or not. People do not believe it and it is all right to laugh at it as you have just done."

"It sounds reasonable."

"Certainly. If such bill is not posted up, restaurants and the like cannot be run.

"It's something like a special business license.

"A special business license! Ha,ha,ha...."

The speaker and the listeners all laughed.

The platoon leader who was usually shy of laughing



followed suit. I also laughed heartily. By their laugh they jeered at the rulers who made "anti-communism" state policy, regarding it as the cure-all and the "go-ahead" for everything.

"Anti-communism meaning the special business license... Tut, tut!"

The old man who was attentively listening to what the people said abruptly spat at the plate bearing the word "anti-communism"

I felt that the old man and the platoon leader who hinted to him and the cashier of the restaurant were of one mind.

Public sentiment was converging at the truth. The people who had grasped the truth always strove after and defended it and fought against injustice.

The old man made cutting remarks:

"They seem to be afraid of the north. Chun Doo Hwan and his ilk threaten people and throw their weight about but fear the north.

"The fact that they posted up anti-communist bill in the eating house shows how afraid they are."

Platoon Leader Choe Chang U and I left having eaten a bowlful of cheap hot beef soup with rice.

The platoon leader who was walking silently addressed me, glancing at me:

"U Gil, you've just heard what is in people's minds. They are looking towards the north. Sunflower follows the sun in any place."

"Yes, I see."

"A country old man ridiculed the so-called statesman of the Blue House. It's awfully funny.

"The days have gone when politics served as an artifice for deceiving the people. The popular masses



find the mightiness of the north in the frenzied anti-communist clamour of Chun Doo Hwan.

“Although we serve in the army we must not become the watchdog of Chun Doo Hwan. We must not become bullet shield for the American soldiers.

“Why should we level our guns at our brothers in the north?

“Be aware of this, but talk nothing to others.”

I was grateful to the platoon leader. He unburdened himself to me. I reposed great trust in him.

We walked on silently.

That day a fine caricature was made of this world full of contradictions in the Silla Restaurant.

It was a political caricature that deserved the Nobel prize even at the world comics exhibition.

The image of the country old man who acted as a first-rate caricaturist in the Silla Restaurant rose before my mind's eye over and over again.

I walked on with a light heart.



## **7. Following the Sun, Following the Star**

That sun and that star shining over the dark world.  
Thanks to their dazzling rays the road ahead of us is  
bright.

I will go after the sun and after the star to the new  
hill of life where our ideal is blooming.

### **The Milky Way**

Once people have a heart-to-heart talk, their minds  
seem to communicate with each other.

To know each other's thought is difficult, but, once  
they come to know it, they find it easy to unite. Such  
was the relation between Platoon Leader Choe Chang U  
and me. I took to him not simply because he was my  
senior at university. He had a burning sense of justice  
and a strong love for truth.

I often recalled the occurrence at the Silla Restaurant  
where he spoke well of the north to an old countryman. I  
thought he was not simply a platoon leader of the south  
Korean army for me but a senior in life advancing  
towards truth, and this not only I. Most of the soldiers in  
the platoon looked up to him with a feeling of trust.

The political education officers would wag an abus-  
ive tongue against the north, yelling for "fighting  
against communism" and "destroying communism".



But he spoke differently.

One day Platoon Leader Chang U told me to come to his room. As I went to him in a hurry, he grinned and said:

"U Gil, won't you come with me to Cholla Province?"

"I'll do as ordered."

"This is not an order. The battalion commander told me to go to Kangjin, South Cholla Province, with an enlisted man and buy a small tractor for him. It appears he has a cousin there. I suppose he's planning to make a fortune by farming the waste land around the base with the small tractor."

"I'll go with you."

"Good. Let's go together. We're fed up with the army life and so let's go for a change of air."

"I see. I'm also of the same opinion."

Thus we left for the coast of the Archipelago on the South Sea of Korea. Platoon Leader Chang U was freed from his duty by leaving his platoon temporarily in the care of another platoon leader on the order of the battalion commander.

Upon arrival in Kangjin, we finished our task in no time and took up our lodgings in a farmhouse by the sea with the intention of enjoying the sceneries of the Archipelago even for a few days.

The blue sea always calm like a lake and unutterably beautiful, the quiet islands dotting the sea as far as the horizon, and the fishing boats like skiffs rowed by fishermen.... We did fishing all day long on the beach with the air streaming in the cool wind, and all my worries and weariness seemed to vanish all at once. It all seemed unreal to me that I should be enjoying such leisurely hours even in the hellish life of the "National



Army". The words of Platoon Leader Chang U came home to my heart with a dynamic force that one must not submit tamely to the life forced upon him but learn to lead a life his own way and build up a world for himself.

Soon the sun was down and stars began to twinkle in the sky. When darkness came on, we went back to the small upper room of the old man Yun's thatched house, which looked like an inverted half of a chestnut shell lying on the shore. The old couple were very kindhearted.

Lying in the dark room, I tried to get to sleep from the early evening. But the thought of my home pressed upon my mind, keeping me from falling asleep. The platoon leader who had been treated to a rice wine at the home of somebody living nearby was snoring loudly in his sleep.

As I grew wider awake, I went up to the window and looked outside. I saw villagers sitting together on a mat spread on the wooden floor before the sitting room. They were talking about something which sounded like a legend.

In the village the old Yun's house was known as the place of get-together for the sociable villagers.

Under the moonlight a tall persimmon tree added much to the evening scenery. I could hear snatches of words exchanged between the village folks in the yard where dried weed was burnt to smoke out mosquitoes.

"Look up at the sky. Don't you think the Milky Way is behaving strangely these days? Recently the Milky Way has become brighter than ever before," the old man Yun said looking round at the people proudly as if he was the only person who knew the fact.



"Why has it become brighter?"

"Is it the work of heaven?"

All present looked at the old Yun with eyes full of curiosity. I was also lured into looking up at the sky through the window. Strangely enough, the Milky Way was brighter just as the old man said, I felt as if the Milky Way stretching across the night sky was flowing into my heart. Indeed, how deeply my heart had been stirred when I gazed up at the Milky Way behind bars every night! The Galaxy gives forth something emotional which carries away people to the land of ideal, to the dreamland. The old man went on:

"There's a reason why the Milky Way has turned brighter of late. It's all because the noble minds of the great General Kim Il Sung and Mr. Kim Jong Il in the north are reflected in the sky."

"General Kim Il Sung?"

"Mr. Kim Jong Il?!"

The eyes of all the villagers at the place shone brightly.

"Yes. Their minds mirrored in the sky even make the Milky Way brighter, I say. This is no doubt an omen of an unprecedented event."

"An unprecedented event?"

"Certainly. An unprecedented event now must be implying that the Yankees will be driven out and the door will be opened for territorial reunification," unreservedly said the old man who hailed from Pyongan Province, smoothing down his not long beard thoughtfully.

"Really, I've heard that these days the old trees on Mt. Halla are bearing flowers and deer are bringing forth their young. Moreover, it is said that Red Phoenix is dancing and the White Tiger singing."



"I've heard that Paengnok Pond on Mt. Halla has been filled with water of late. It's said that water of Lake Chon on Mt. Paekdu has flown into the dried Paengnok Pond to fill it."

Everybody said his say.

"All this is a good omen. It's a sign of a great happy event for our nation, I say. In the bygone days of Japanese rule the General Star appeared over Mt. Paekdu bringing ruin to the Japanese, and recently the guiding star has appeared over Pyongyang to spell the ruin of the Americans, they say," said the old man Yun confidently.

Lured by their talk, I came closer to the window.

"Hush! I wonder if you'll be safe to speak carelessly like this. Army men are staying with you, aren't they?"

"Never mind. They look good people. They're now fast asleep. Hear that? They're tired that they're snoring now."

In fact, the platoon leader was snoring loudly, he seemed to be hovering in a dream. I was surprised to know the thoughts of the ordinary elders gathered at a farmhouse on the shore of the Archipelago.

The platoon leader who I thought was asleep snoring was now lying quiet, probably straining his ears to catch their conversation which was audible by snatches.

After a while he sat up suddenly and, seeing me standing at the window eavesdropping the conversation outside, remarked in a cynical tone.

"Yong Son, you seem to feel interested in the conversation of the old folks."

"No, Platoon Leader."

"Don't say no. Do you think I don't know your







thought? I'm not against your listening to such a talk, so listen to it as you please. Only you must be careful of your tongue."

"Why! Then did you hear it yourself, Platoon Leader?"

"Why not. You can hear talks like that anywhere. All honestminded people in this land have the highest respect for the clear-sighted General Kim Il Sung and Mr. Kim Jong Il who are in Pyongyang, I tell you. Is it Heaven or Allah who'll save us, the people in the south? No! Only the respected General Kim Il Sung and the dear Mr. Kim Jong Il show us the path to independence, freedom and reunification and the ways of acquiring education and farm land and finding value in everything." His voice rang through the room in a high tone. My heart burnt with a stirring excitement.

The villagers continued with their lively conversation under the moonlit persimmon tree, and their words were deeply engraved in my mind, stirring up an endless wave of excitement. They went home when the night was far advanced. I lay down on my bed, but could not get to sleep. The excited voice of the old man Yun and the assuring words of the platoon leader lingered in my ears like an echo, and so I could hardly calm my excitement.

I passed a wakeful night, and when I got up at dawn, I found the platoon leader who had been lying by my side was missing. I went out in haste and looked about. He was standing outside the door. Seeing me, he winked at me to be quiet.

The day was breaking. The old couple of the house went outside the hedge and tidied up themselves and, mumbling something, bowed low towards the northern sky where the Big Dipper was still shining. What's the



matter? The eyes of the platoon leader crossed mine. It was hard to guess why they bowed low. We hid ourselves behind the corner of the house so as not to disturb them in their solemn prayer. After making a deep bow, they approached the well-grown wild roses and magnolias by the rocks on the seashore with silver bowls in their hands, and carefully collected something into the bowls from their leaves.

What are they doing? Our curiosity rose.

We stole up unnoticed and saw them collecting morning dewdrops into the bowls from the leaves with great care. Their respectful bow and collection of morning dewdrops filled my mind with a question and stirring emotion.

Seeing the old couple who were gathering dewdrops, their gray hair flying in the sea wind, I pictured to my mind the faces of my parents in Seoul with my heart filled with longing for them.

At last, the platoon leader walked up to them. The old man gave a start, but greeted him with a smile, saying:

"Oh, are you up already?"

"Yes. But what are you collecting dewdrops for, Grandad?"

Asked by the platoon leader, the old man gave a vague answer:

"For making a tonic."

"Tonic?"

"Leave it at that, Mr. Soldier. It's an internal affair of my family."

It seemed that the platoon leader guessed what it was all about; he drove straight forward to the point:

"Grandad, don't try to equivocate but be frank with us please. Last night we overheard your interesting talk



outside the door. We were deeply impressed."

"Do you say you've heard all our conversation? Heavens!"

Opening his eyes wide, the old man glanced round in a fright. Platoon Leader Chang U smiled as if to set him at ease and helped the old couple in collecting dew-drops into the silver bowls.

"Grandad, don't worry. We are all one with you in mind," said he.

"Are you?! Oh what a surprise you gave me!"

The old man gave a sigh of relief and told us the reasons why they made a respectful bow and were collecting dewdrops. He said that rain or shine, the couple rose earlier than other villagers every morning and made a deep bow towards the north. And each time they made a bow, they expressed their best wishes by uttering the words, "May the august General Kim Il Sung live long and ageless and the young General Kim Jong Il enjoy eternal youth." How splendid!

He also said that after making a respectful bow every morning they gathered drops of dew from the leaves of the flower plants to make an elixir of life liquor wishing them a long life and good health. Looking at the bright eyes of both of us in turn, he said:

"They say a liquor of elixir can be distilled from 70 kinds of famous medicinal herbs collected from Mt. Halla and mixed evenly and put in clean dew water. So I've been to Cheju Island and collected rare medicinal materials on Mt. Halla staying there for a month or so. I gathered 70 kinds of medicinal herbs with the intention of presenting a liquor of elixir distilled from them to the noble General Kim Il Sung on his 70th birthday.



"My idea is to send the liquor to the General by someone who is going to the north. I cannot tell whether my wish will be fulfilled or not, but in any case, it's my family's earnest desire, and so I believe it'll surely reach him some day.

"They say sincerity will move the heavens, and who knows if a kind person will appear and help me attain my desire?"

After a pause he continued:

"Young men, you can hardly understand my mind to the full. During the past war dear General Kim Il Sung gave land to me who had not a patch of land to till. How can I forget his benevolence even in my death?

"I'm waiting for the day when General Kim Il Sung will come to the south."

His eyes shone brilliantly. His heart was so pure and sincere that Platoon Leader Chang U clasped the old man's hands involuntarily. Cordially taking the high-minded old man by the arm, I called:

"Grandad!"

The minds and images of the high-minded people in this land were mirrored in his mind and face.

We remained silent for a good while looking at each other. Our silent exchange of eyes spoke volumes.

The cool breeze from the Archipelago kept our hair streaming.

The wholehearted devotion of the couple to the sun and the star and their feelings of veneration as pure as morning dew seemed to have come into flowers of wild roses.

Sea gulls circled over the dawning waters, and the red sun rose above the horizon.



## **A Child's Mind Cannot Be Bound**

All high-minded persons I had met, though living in the south, were mentally residing in the north which was lit up by the sun and the star. Regardless of their age, their hearts were full of yearning for the sun and the star.

One day an amazing event occurred in our company. A small boy was caught by a hidden picket near the truce line while attempting to cross over to the north. It was not a rare occurrence; such incidents were so frequent all the year round that no one paid any attention to it at the company.

But somehow I felt like having a look at the boy. His resolve to go to the north was praiseworthy and his intention was valuable.

Luckily, it occurred when the company commander was out on furlough, and so the examination of the boy was assigned to Platoon Leader Chang U.

The platoon leader allowed nobody into his room, but since a record of examination had to be taken, he called me to his room. Pfc. Yun and Choe nudged me in the ribs out of envy. I wondered what a fearless boy the child must be to be bold as that.

Prompted by an impulse to see the boy, I went to the platoon leader's room at a run.

A boy in worn-out clothes was seated before the platoon leader, cowering and with his head lowered. Although his appearance was shabby, his eyes shone like stars.

Platoon Leader Chang U asked:



"What's your name?"

"...."

"I'm asking your name."

"...."

The boy remained silent. It looked he was struck with fear. It was quite natural that the child should tremble with fear and become tongue-tied to think that as a boy he was now being examined at army barracks inaccessible to civilians.

As the boy was sitting huddled up on a wood bench, his look called back the memory of my boyhood passed on the shores of the river Han.

Probably the platoon leader meant to intimidate the boy; he suddenly burst into an angry roar:

"Where do you think you're now? This is the army barracks where even a mute is made to speak. You don't know the taste of corporal punishment, do you? You know what'll become of you if you don't own up frankly, eh?"

"If you displease me, I'll shoot you to death."

With this the platoon leader went through the motion of firing a pistol. After watching the boy's behaviour for some time, he said in a very gentle voice:

"Don't be afraid but speak out. I've a younger brother like you. If you regard me as your elder brother and speak out frankly, I'll let you go home. But if you tell me a lie, I'll throw you into the guardhouse. Understand?"

The boy who was hanging his head without a word raised his head and shot a glance at the platoon leader.

"Your name?"

"Han Byong Nam."

"How old?"

"14."







"Where do you come from?"

"Paju."

"Paju? It's place I know of well. There are lots of Yankees and Korean harlots at the place, aren't there?"

"Yes, there are lots of them."

"To what school d'you go?"

"I haven't finished primary school, but I'm working to earn money."

"Earn money? Ho, here's a big fellow. A small boy, how do you earn money?"

"I'm picking rags."

"Rags?! Well, is there money in that job?"

"Quite often I return home empty-handed."

"Why?"

"I can't find an unoccupied garbage pit."

The boy's words brought back to my mind the painful memory of the days when I went picking rags. I thought there was probably no one who could understand better than me the pains of the people who picked rags and rummaged the rubbish dumps. I was a "full member" of the "garbage republic".

The platoon leader questioned again in a sympathetic tone:

"What's your father's job?"

"I've no father."

"Your mother then?"

"Have no mother."

"Then are you an orphan?"

"Yes, we four brothers are orphans."

I learned that his father who had worked at a construction site had fallen from a high tree and died. His mother who had been sick from mental anguish for a month or so died of acute pneumonia.



Bereaved of their both parents in this way, the boy and his brothers had no means of living. As the young head of the family, Byong Nam sold off the articles belonging to his parents and handed out the small amount of the sales to his brothers before sending them away to stay in their uncle's and aunts' respectively.

Left alone, he tried to go to school with his own efforts, now doing rag picking and now doing house cleaning for the rich. However, the world was too heartless to open the school gate for the boy despite his efforts to work his way through school.

Cutting him short, the platoon leader asked again:

"The brother soldier over there lived as you did. I also studied in the same way.... Now I'm sick of hearing such words.

"And why did you try to cross over to north Korea?"

After sitting in silence for a good while, the boy told a lie with cool impudence:

"I did not try to go to north Korea."

"How then have you come near to the truce line?"

"I lost my way while going to my parental uncle's house."

"You brat, don't tell a lie. Civilians don't live around here, you know. This is a place closed to people not in military uniform. Even a mouse isn't allowed to move about freely here, I tell you."

"Really I didn't try to go over to the north. I took the wrong way."

"You aren't an honest child. I told you just before. If you put faith in me as in your own brother and tell me the truth outright, I'll send you back home, but if you lie, you shall die in the guardhouse. Speak out without fear!"

The platoon leader persuaded the boy in a gentle



voice so as to melt his frozen heart and induce him to speak freely:

"What made you think of deserting south Korea and going over to the north?"

"Er-r-r," the boy faltered.

"Don't worry. Out with it quickly, I tell you. We're soldiers of the same mind with you. Speak out quickly!"

"I wanted to go to the north for schooling."

"Schooling?"

"Yes. It is said that in north Korea General Kim Il Sung sends orphans like me to school free of charge. The General becomes a father to the parentless school children."

The boy's eyes sparkled with a ray of hope and yearning.

"And then what's the next thing you heard?"

"I heard that Mr. Kim Jong Il closely embraces children like me and makes them study as much as they hope. In our village the story of the guiding star is afloat. Hearing the story, hungry children will feel their stomach full, and thinking of the star, sad children will get their tears dry.

"So I wanted to go after the star."

"Where have you heard of such things?"

"I've heard and seen them. Seen them on television from the north, at my friend's house. I have seen both General Kim Il Sung and Mr. Kim Jong Il. In the north where they administer the state affairs, all people are equally well-off."

The platoon leader remained speechless for a while. I cast a look at him with a throbbing heart.

The boy's words were correct. Nothing could erase or smother up the truth engraved in his pure childish heart.



"Byong Nam, from now you must not speak of such things carelessly at other places, or you'll pay dearly for it. I mean you'll end up in prison.

"Well now, if somebody should ask you, you must answer that you missed the way and came as far as this place. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see."

"All right. We'll write down as agreed in this record of examination. So you must speak the same thing at the MP station, too. Only then will you pass off unharmed."

"Thank you, Uncle Platoon Leader!"

"Don't mention it. Wherever you go, you must live in the same spirit as you said just now.

"Must live following the sun and the star. Some day you'll be able to cross over to the north. You must live with such faith in the south. Understand?"

"Yes!"

The platoon leader passed his hand over the boy's hair.

Working out the interrogation paper, we wrote down in detail that the boy happened to come near the army barracks from carelessness, that the examination proved that he lost his way in the night and was caught by the hidden picket, and that he had no "seditious ideas" but had a good "tendency".

The boy was interrogated again at the gendarmerie, but set free thanks to the record we had worked out. I felt a pain in my heart at the thought that this poor boy who was empty-handed at the start of his life would go through hardships on the steep path of cruel life. I was deeply chagrined at my own inability to give anything to the laudable boy as a souvenir.

The platoon leader thrust some money as travelling



expenses into the boy's pocket as he bobbed good-bye to him. The boy's eyes were swimming with tears.

As he was going away, he turned round and bowed to us time and again. Gazing at this receding figure, I felt a lump in my throat.

"If he had strayed into my beat when I was on hidden picket duty, I would have let him go over to the north," I thought to myself with a rising feeling of regret.

## **At Pagoda Park**

Time flew like an arrow. It raced by and the leaves of calendar were turned over so fast.

As all things are said to be in a state of mutation, nature and human world changed with passage of time.

Helicopters filled the sky and heavy tanks thundered across the fields and hills. It was noon when the offensive exercises ended. Pfc. Choe rushed up and gave me a letter. "U Gil, here's a letter from your girl friend in Seoul."

"You rascal! You're teasing me again."

"I mean what I say. Look at this, 'Sun I, Chongno Ward, Seoul.' The platoon leader told me to hand it to you."

"Sun I?"

I went cold inside. What's the matter? It was the first letter from Miss Sun I in my one year and half long army life.

"The gendarmerie must have checked up on the letter. But what can it be that she's written in it?" I wondered. In any case, I was glad to receive it, but at the same time I felt uneasy. Quickly I opened the envelope and read it. The letter addressed to An U Gil was brief:



"Mr. Yong Son, we've written to you already three times, but we got no answer from you. I wonder if you have been transferred to another unit. I want you to come home on leave for a short visit.

"An urgent matter awaits you at home. I'll tell you the whole story when we meet.

Wishing you good health,  
Sun I"

This was all the tenor of the letter. With the letter in my hand, I stood motionless as if transfixed to the spot.

"What on earth does she mean by an urgent matter?" I thought to myself.

A thousand and one vagrant thoughts crowded on through my hazy consciousness:

With Pfc. Choe, I went to see Platoon Leader Chang U. The platoon leader took in the situation with a single glance.

"I'll speak to the company commander to grant you a leave of absence for visiting home. I hope there'll be nothing serious."

He immediately went to the company commander and told him of my trouble and got a leave of absence for me. He came back with a certificate of leave. But for his special agency and backing, a leave of absence would have been out of the question.

As I was leaving for home to see my aged parents, my friends were rather flustered. Grieved at my returning home empty-handed, a friend of mine put in my hand the remainder of remittance from his home, though a small sum, and some "food stealers' party" members put into my knapsack a few cans and a bottle of whisky they had carried away from a shop and an eating house



which they had raided by surprise. The "food stealers' party" members were agile as ever in their activity.

The platoon leader came up and gave me several 100-*won* notes out of his thin pay envelope, asking me to buy even a few packs of herb medicine for my sick father and a headscarf for my mother.

Even in the infernal south Korean army such warm feelings communicated between people who were sympathetic and attached to each other. I felt a lump in my throat and my eyes got moist. Pfc. Choe and Yun, Corporal Ko and Sergeant Pak who were all "food stealers' party" members, the dear Platoon Leader Chang U and many others turned out to see me off, waving their hands. Reflected on their faces were mixed feelings of envy and sympathy, worrying about my future which might hold a tragic fate in store for me. At last my eyes were filled with tears.

Leaving the barracks, I came out on the highway. I saw a truck coming along in the distance raising a cloud of dust. I stepped out to the middle of the road and raised my hand. The truck came to a sudden stop. The driver frowned at me, as if to say, though I was in military uniform, how I dared stop the vehicle at will by stepping out the middle of the highway. I said that I was sorry for stopping the truck, but that I had some urgent matter to attend to back at home. With this I entreated him to give me a lift as far as Seoul. My appeal was so earnest that at my first words of entreaty, he nodded me onto the back of the truck.

I was grateful. I got on without delay. The truck ran at full speed. Leaning against the driver's cabin on the jolting truck, I cooled my face exposed to the streaming air.



Reaching Miari slope of Seoul, the truck stopped suddenly.

The driver rather asked me pleadingly if I would not get off there because his vehicle was now going into the city of Seoul proper, where checking would be strict and frequent. The driver turned out to be a kindhearted fellow. I was just thinking I would have to get off.

Coming down from the back of the truck, I made to take out the money given by my friends and offer it to him in token of my thanks for the ride.

"Oh, no! I don't take money."

"Well, then...."

He was indeed a kind driver. I cordially bade him farewell. The truck moved off, raising a cloud of dust behind it. I took a city bus and got off near Pagoda Park. I walked into different shops near the park to buy medicine for dad and a headscarf for mother following the advice of my friends. I could not afford to buy anything for Miss Sun I. Her family had a good living and so I thought that it would be enough to place faith in her.

I was rather excited as I was heading for my home. Somehow I had an ominous presentiment, which I could not shake off. Wishing to allay my troubled mind, I dropped in at Pagoda Park nearby. It was crowded with people as usual. I recalled many things associated with my high school and university days when I strolled with my friends there.

The trees in the park grew old now, but green leaves of reminiscence were still fresh and falling softly on my path. At the small octagonal pavilion in the park, I saw a dozen of people in different attire engaged in a lively conversation.



One day when I was a university student, I happened to come here. At that time, too, heated discussion was going on here about an unusual question. It was the "Pagoda National Assembly" in session, as the newspapers put it. The "Pagoda National Assembly" was a "national assembly of the masses".

The National Assembly moved from its original building on Taepyong Avenue to Youi Islet on the Han River. The present National Assembly on Youi Islet was Chun Doo Hwan's private national assembly at the beck and call of the Blue House; it is an object of denunciation and criticism among the people.

The "Youi-do National Assembly" had never debated a matter in the interests of the masses in conformity to the desire of the people. In other words, it has been a laughing stock of the public as a National Assembly going back on the people's expectation and as a puppet of Chun Doo Hwan.

A genuine "National Assembly" of the masses where people discuss the political situation and the people's livelihood functions at all places where citizens are gathered.

This "National Assembly" opens at the Changgyong Palace Grounds, Changchundan Park, Namsan Park and in the downtown offices of real estate agencies. It also works at the waiting halls of railway stations and the party rooms of farmhouses where neighbours would gather for an evening chat. Here all kinds of subjects are on the agenda of the "National Assembly" from the sensational "rumour reports" floating around the Blue House to commodity prices on black markets. When people who share the same thought and are of one mind meet, they speak



about north Korea in whispers. At the "Pagoda National Assembly" that day the wonderful life in the north was the subject of talk.

A "Pagoda National Assemblyman", seemingly a handcart puller, told grizzled intellectuals and students in discoloured clothes:

"I think it will do well to begin today's 'Pagoda National Assembly' by expressing our impressions of *Pictorial Pyongyang*. Look through this pictorial cautiously so that you may not be detected by the cops."

He took out a well-thumbed pictorial from inside his coat. The interested persons around there came close and looked through the book.

I also went near and looked into the colour pictorial from behind their backs. It was said that the book came via Japan. Looking into the pictorial, I nearly forgot that I must go home in a hurry.

There is nothing like seeing for oneself. At first glance, I saw that Pyongyang was an ideal city far more beautiful than I had imagined in my mind.

The owner of the pictorial who was a "Pagoda National Assemblyman" explained leafing the pages of the pictorial:

"Look! This is the world-famous Mansudae Art Theatre. Here's the Grand People's Study House. Then here's the indoor stadium. Now this is the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital. Then the Changgwang Health Complex, the People's Palace of Culture and so on.

"This street lined with high-rise buildings is Changgwang Street, and this is Munsu Street...."

Listening to his animated explanation, they turned the pages one after another. Everything I saw was really a wonder. A learned man said in an excited voice:



"I've been to New York, Paris and London. And the skyscrapers there looked choky and gloomy. Compared with these fashionable cities boasting of civilization, how refreshing, romantic, cubical and popular-oriented Pyongyang is!"

"Look at this Seoul where we are living. How choky! As poet Kim Ji Ha squibbed, Seoul is a large 'chamber pot.' Extravagance and vanity and dissipation are prevailing in the streets."

Every "Pagoda National Assemblyman" spoke out spitefully.

A young man spoke of the bright complexion of the people in the north:

"Look at this. How bright and lively the Pyongyang citizens look! It is said that the facial expression of the people is immediately the look and political appearance of a country. So, because the politics of the north is bright, the faces of its people are radiant. They have no worry and anxiety, nor anguish and mental affliction, and so their faces are glowing with such cheerfulness and they look so confident.

"The faces of us, the Seoul citizens, who are crushed with living hardship look careworn, but the Pyongyang citizens look cheerful."

As time passed, the talk of the "Pagoda National Assemblymen" became more animated.

But here no one quarrelled or staged a scene of "wrestling" gripping each other's throat, which was a common scene at the erstwhile "National Assembly on Taepyong Avenue" and at present "Youi-do National Assembly" For them there was no restriction of time or prohibition or set order in their speeches.

Everybody burned with respect and adoration of the



sun of Juche and the guiding star who built a Utopia and a new welfare society for the people in north Korea.

Their attachment to the sun and the star was so passionate that as a man of letters put it, they desired to build on Mt. Paekdu a tower with stars twinkling in the sky wishing them a long life in good health, and to bring together all the beautiful rainbows over the earth and weave them into an olive tree of glory for them in the sky of Juche.

At this moment, a middle-aged man hissed, "Hush, a black dog is coming. Now 'Assembly' recesses!" Those present moved away like ordinary strollers as if there was nothing particular. A policeman in uniform was passing on the other side of the park swinging his cudgel. They looked sideways also at me because I was wearing south Korean army uniform and went away in all directions, as though by a promise.

They could hardly imagine that though in south Korean army uniform, I was one of them in thinking. It was just a passing scene of the "Pagoda National Assembly" that I witnessed hastily on my way home, but it was a lively scene reflecting the minds of the masses! Seeing them dispersing in all directions, I exclaimed in my mind:

"The masses of this land are going after the sun. The people's minds are flowing in a stream after the sun and the star. No force can stop the powerful stream of the people's minds which is flowing with a rush."

I could not resist my heart joining this stream.



## **My Last Night in Seoul**

I saw a lot of change in the streets of Seoul where I came back after a long absence. Everything looked strange to me—the glaringly Westernized and Japanized street scenes, the people's appearance totally un-Korean, and the changed minds of the people in the street.

Everything in the streets of Seoul had undergone a change. As I was walking down the street, my thoughts and conception of life seemed to change.

I felt unwittingly that I was not myself of the day when I had left Seoul in the past. At that time I had been taken away as a captive of fate. But now I did not want to leave myself obediently to the boat of accursed fate.

It seemed that my eyesight about everything became clearer and my heart grew bigger. The nearer I came to my home the more my heart thumped. What is awaiting me at home?

The moment I opened the door I doubted my eyes. The house was empty. One or two pieces of broken bowls were lying in the kitchen and wornout clothes were left in a pile in a corner of the room.

My old school bag was lying on the broken desk which was standing tilted on one side. My books on sociology which I used to read with great interest were torn and scattered about.

The empty house bare of human warmth was dreary, reminding one of a desolate scene after a tempest. An ominous foreboding flashed through my mind.

“Did they move to another place? Then what does



Miss Sun I's letter mean?"

Petrified like a stone in the room, I tried hard to drive away the ominous premonition which was looming large in my mind. I struggled against the shadow of misfortune to shove it out of my imagination. I hoped for the best. But however hard I might try, I could not find a good omen, or a happy sign, unless something extraordinary happened.

With a heavy heart I came out of the house. I was rather afraid of finding out the possible catastrophe that might have struck my family. So I fought against thousands of uneasy thoughts that crowded in upon my mind.

After a good while I knocked on the door of our next-door neighbour, the "house from Haeju". The aunt of the house rushed out to meet me. She looked much older while I was away. She eyed me in army uniform from head to foot.

"Auntie, I'm Yong Son of the next-door house."

"Oh my! You're Yong Son. Yong Son dear!"

On recognizing me, she got into tears clasping my hands. She wept sorrowfully for a few minutes before looking me in the face with tearful eyes, and said:

"My boy, don't you know as yet?"

"...."

"You heard nothing of the misfortune that befell your home?"

I did not want to ask any question. My pain was too much to bear, and I did not want to hear any more. I was only standing blankly when she said:

"Well, you know the pretty girl of the respectable family living in Chongno Ward. She came many times to clear up the affairs of your home."



"Thank you, auntie! I'll go and see her."

I bowed good-bye to her and hurried along to Sun I's house. In my university days I had gone as far as the gate of her house a few times but I had turned back without seeing her.

Arriving at her house, I pushed the doorbell without hesitation. It was sometime before the gate was opened and dear Sun I appeared. A university student in the graduating class, Miss Sun I was pretty and well-refined and graceful. But how shabby I looked!

"Dear me! It's you Mr. Yong Son."

She grasped my hands and took me into the house.

"Mother, Mr. Yong Son's come!"

"Yong Son? Good gracious! You've changed beyond recognition. Come in."

The kind mother welcomed me like her own son. Miss Sun I's father was teaching as ever as a professor at the K University. He welcomed me coming out of the study where he had been writing.

My throat tightened as I was met with such warm affection in this cruel world. There was a shadow of misfortune in my face.

After exchanging greetings with Sun I's parents, I went behind a white poplar in the small garden with Miss Sun I. She talked about harmless matters in order not to touch me on the raw.

"Miss Sun I, I received your letter. Tell me everything frankly. What's happened to my family? I was roughly told of it by a next-door neighbour."

"Mr. Yong Son!" she said, but could not continue. She sobbed covering her face with her hands. She had been trying to show a bright smile to me. But now her smile was gone and tears streamed down her cheeks.



After a good while, Miss Sun I related the tragic story of my family.

My father who had been bedridden for an internal injury died a year after I had been pressed into the army. He had taken the medicine Sun I's family had bought for him and often gone to see doctor, but all this was in vain. And nothing was heard of my sister who had gone to Brazil as an emigrant.

After the death of my father, my disheartened mother lived alone in the house. Sometimes she would wander the streets like a woman out of her senses.

One day she set out northward across Miari Hill Road in the hope of seeing me, her only son. Her only thought was that whenever she saw a south Korean army unit, she would ask them where I was. At the time, the largest joint military exercise "Team Spirit" was going on even around Seoul, and so the road was jammed with GI trucks.

US army trucks, tanks and heavy guns were moving along the road frightening the Korean wayfarers. A GI truck which was racing madly along the road hit my mother and mortally wounded her.

When Sun I, together with my university classmates Sun Ho and Il Su, rushed to the scene belatedly, my mother had already passed away. Sun I's family and Sun Ho and Il Su buried my mother by my father's side. My gratitude to Miss Sun I and her father Prof. Cho Un Song who was my teacher, and to my dear fellow students who buried my parents for their peaceful sleep in place of this good-for-nothing son knew no bounds.

I felt an impulse to give them a hug in token of my thanks for kindly doing this son's duty in my place to my poor deceased father and mother. It was a kind turn that



they had done to me which I could not forget for eternity even after I should be reduced to a handful of soil in my death.

"Mother! Father!" I cried tottering and hugging the poplar for all I was worth.

The parcel containing the medicine that I had bought for father and the headscarf for mother slipped and fell from my hand. Not knowing what to do, Miss Sun I wept with me, calling my name over and over again.

"Mr. Yong Son! Stop crying please. I was to blame. I wanted to take your mother to my home to live with us until you are demobilized. But your mother did not hear me. She said that what if you are back home some day, and that at least she, your mother, should keep the house now that father was gone, so that she could meet you when you come back," Sun I said between her sobs.

Miss Sun I's parents were watching us on the verandah. They were also wiping tears off their eyes.

Sun I continued in earnest:

"I really was wrong. I should have taken your mother to my house whether she agreed or not. Mr. Yong Son, please forgive me.

"I wrote to your unit three times and then wired to inform you of it quickly. It was a horrible time when military exercises went on for months, so they shelved all letters from civilians, it was said."

I looked at Sun I once more in gratitude. I asked myself whether I could do the same for her if we changed places. I adored her noble character and was deeply touched by her unusually beautiful and pure heart.

"Thank you, Miss Sun I! I tender my sincere thanks to



you. Your kindness will be ever present in my heart. I bow my head before you for all my life."

I clenched my teeth and fist. A hatred for the Yankees who killed my mother flashed through my heart like lightning.

There is a saying that love should be as hot as fire and hatred as cold as ice. Because I loved my mother I hated so much the more the Yankees who killed my mother. As I was whetting the knife for revenge in my heart, my eyes blazed with enmity. I had known the feelings of anger and hatred, but at the moment my wrath was past all control.

That day, together with Miss Sun I and Kang Sun Ho and Pak Il Su, I visited the grave of my parents on the back hill of the cemetery in Suyu-ri. My gratitude for the trouble taken by Miss Sun I's family and my friends in erecting the tomb so neatly was boundless.

I put the medicine for father and headscarf for mother which were the wholehearted presents of my platoon leader and my companions in arms before the grave and offered a cup of wine for my deceased parents. Miss Sun I laid a bunch of wild flowers before it and offered a cup of wine and other friends, too, followed suit.

I stood still like a stone before the grave. My parents had suffered from hardships all their life. As a son I hoped to make them happy in their old age. However, all my hope vanished into thin air like an echo and burst like a bubble.

I burned incense before the spirits of my departed parents. Yet, it could not console them and only the feeling of grudge and cursing smouldered in my mind. Resentments against this wicked world, against the American bastards and against the traitor Chun Doo



Hwan could hardly be suppressed. I clenched my fist and compressed my lips.

Father and mother were no more, and they did not answer my call in their dear voice now.

"Father! Mother! Forgive me, this unfilial son. Do curse this silly son.

"Form now at least, I'll live to be worthy of the name of your son and console your souls. I'll try to stand before your spirits as a worthy son. I ask you, even in your grave, not to call me your son should I fail to revenge mother's death and pay off old scores for father's sake."

Without wiping away the tears streaming down my cheeks, I vowed vengeance over and over again before the grave.

Standing in front of my parental grave which I could not tell when I would be able to visit again, I cried for daddy and mummy for the last time in my voice of childhood when I used to run up to them and throw myself in their arms both in joy and in sorrow.

Miss Sun I and other friends took me by the hand and tore me away from the grave of my parents. All descended the hill in silence with faces wet with tears.

Darkness fell as usual over this mournful day. We were back in Sun I's house. Miss Sun I and Sun Ho and Il Su, much concerned about me, remained beside me. Professor Un Song who had taught us truth in university offered me a cup of liquor.

For the first time in my life I drank a hard liquor cup after cup. I tossed off the cups offered me by the friends and the teacher with the sincere desire to soothe my bleeding heart even for a minute by means of alcoholic drink. They spoke many consolatory words to me and



talked about university days in reminiscence. Miss Sun I who was shedding tears for me inwardly, was wearing smile on her face.

Professor Un Song remarked meaningfully:

"Man must not trim the sails to the wind of fate. I've keenly realized this of late while studying the philosophy of independence, the idea of Juche.

"Yong Son, I expect you to get over all your sorrow and hew out your destiny by yourself in face of the whim of fate. Each time young students stage demonstrations in the streets these days, I come to think a lot. Old as I am, I am standing in their ranks."

"Very glad to hear that, Professor!"

I gazed at Professor Un Song, father of Miss Sun I and my dear teacher.

"My Sun I is also standing by me, her father. She is not a chrysanthemum grown in the green house.

"The authorities bring pressure to bear on us and we receive intimidating phone calls every night, but we, my family, are moving ahead towards truth.

"All of you here are lofty-minded persons, so I tell you that the sun of truth is shining in the sky of Pyongyang. The sun of the truth, I say. The personality of the moderns and the worth of our contemporary intellectuals lie in following the sun of truth, the idea of Juche. You must not forget this even for a moment."

The professor, now in the evening of his life, was living in adolescence with a youthful heart and energy. His eyes shone brilliantly as never before. My eyes met Miss Sun I's affectionate glance for a long time, and I said:

"Dear Professor, I know it, though belatedly. I sensed that truth when I was on the shore of the Archipelago; I







saw the sun of truth at Pagoda Park; I caught sight of the shining sun and star in the mind of a boy who attempted to cross over to the north. I intend to follow the sun of truth as you told us."

"Thank you. Now come on, have a drink in honour of that."

We drained another cup, and my friends warmly clasped my hands. It was late at night when they left.

That pathetic night Miss Sun I and I strolled the sandy beach of the Han River shoulder to shoulder and then gazed up for long at the night sky on Mt. Nam. As we were looking out the night view of Seoul from the top of Mt. Nam, memories of all kinds came back to me. Many pictures passed before my mind's eyes like a film, pictures of the years from my primary school days to the days of my admission to university, the days when I, together with my fellow students, demonstrated on Kwanghwamun Street and the campus holding up placards, the lean face of Miss Sun I who came to see me in prison, and the anxious and careworn faces of father, mother and sister.

I remained silent for a long time lost in deep thought, and Sun I looked into my face, asking me quietly:

"Mr. Yong Son, what are you thinking of now? Are you still thinking of your parents?"

"O yes! No." My instant reply was affirmative, but the next moment I negated. It was almost instinctive.

"Think no more. Please drop your agonizing thought for my sake at least."

She got into tears. It was an outburst of her suppressed emotions. She gave me strength. If I was a man of feeling, she could be considered a woman of will. Thanks to her warm heart with which she soothed and



comforted me suffering a piercing pain, I was standing firm spiritually to fight back my sorrow.

I saw my lifelong companion in Sun I who had such ardent heart. She was feeling my pain more keenly than she would her own. I grasped her hands warmly in spite of myself.

"Miss Sun I!"

"Mr. Yong Son!"

We held each other's hands tightly. Clusters of stars were twinkling brightly in the night sky of Seoul. The starlight seemed to flow into our hearts by travelling through the dark expanse of the universe. Thinking of the great truth about the stars, I said:

"Miss Sun I, let's live like the stars, like the clusters of stars which twinkle even in the darkness."

"Yes, I'll live like stars wherever I am."

"Miss Sun I, let's be the stars over this land which reflect the rays emanating from the sun of Juche and the guiding star!"

I tightened my hold on her hands once more. The stars in the night sky sparkled more brightly as though greeting us. The Milky Way lay across the nocturnal sky and the Big Dipper was brilliant.

Although I retired to bed that night, I could hardly get a wink of sleep. After tossing about in bed, I got up and kept smoking. Cigarette smoke filled the room. I spent the whole night in depressing thoughts.

"What shall I do now? Must I return to the army unit? Or.... Then, when I go back to the unit, should I hold the American gun? Is there no way out for me to realize my youthful dream? Is there no way of giving vent to the rage pent up in my heart?

"Where indeed should I stand in the future? Where on



earth should I go? Where? Where? Where?"

Now turning uneasily on my bed, now getting up, then turning in again, and now getting up again and pacing the room, I repeated this countless times. Sometimes I heard by snatches the voices of Sun I and her mother talking in the next room.

The night passed in endless anguish and mental wandering and, at last, I saw the first gray of dawn through the east window.

This was how I spent my last night in Seoul.

## **Across the Deadline**

I returned to the unit from Seoul, but my heart was heavy and grim. Reticent by nature, I became still more scanty of words after I had suffered a great injury in my heart.

Platoon Leader Chang U took my grief to heart. He was unable to soothe his anger against the Americans who had killed my mother by running over, and took to drinking every night.

My close friends, Pfc. Choe and Yun, and Corporal Ko and Sergeant Pak and others cared to share the grief and agony with me.

The outrages of the wicked officers and company education officers increased and the US military adviser John despised Koreans intolerably. But even in this situation they had humours, jokes, satires and dreams in their life. However, after they were told about the tragic story of my family, they sank into stony silence. It was difficult now to find in them the former images of the cheerful Steal and Eat Party members. Because all



of them saw their fate in my destiny and the dismal end of their parents in the tragic death of my parents.

When I was alone I pondered: What shall I do in the future? What should I do if I am to live in the manner expected by Professor Un Song and Sun I? Shall I destroy everything as Platoon Leader Chang U said? With the passage of time the flames of revengeful thought burned still more fiercely in my mind. The more I hated the Americans, the more I longed for north Korea over which the sun and the star were shining. I passed days and months in such a state of mind.

One day US military adviser John came to inspect our company's exercises. We were called out for an emergency drill and made offensive action exercises under the simulated conditions of nuclear war. We also carried out river-crossing drill.

In the past our platoon had been the flower of our battalion. The platoon leader's uncommonly vivacious spirit and great commanding ability and the morale of the soldiers united as one under his leadership had been widely known. So, our platoon had always been in the lead in the battalion's military exercise inspection. This time, however, our platoon lagged hindermost. This was directly connected with the mood of Platoon Leader Chang U.

In the night exercise in offensive action carried out under the name of "surprise attack on Kaesong", our platoon reached the destination point S later than the appointed time.

This offended the battalion commander and incurred adviser John's disfavour. As I learned later, the battalion commander was the elder brother of Chang Sol, the idiotic son of the director of the civil engineering com-



pany and my classmate from primary school up to university.

Drenched in sweat, we reached the appointed spot behind time to find adviser John, the battalion commander and the battalion education officer at the place who had arrived earlier by car. They were red with anger. Staring at the platoon leader angrily, John spat out:

"Platoon Leader, your platoon is the turtle in the exercise this time, is it?"

The platoon leader retorted sullenly:

"This is the maximum of our platoon's strength. All got exhausted."

"So sluggish like this, how can you seize Kaesong and take Pyongyang? You're affected by a disease in your head."

The adviser tapped the platoon leader on his field cap with a twig he was carrying in his hand. The soldiers got astir at the sight of his insulting behaviour. Shooting an angry glance at the adviser, Platoon Leader Chang U talked back undaunted but containing himself:

"My head is normal. I want you not to insult me for no reason."

"Insult? Your individuality means nothing before the grandeur of our great America. I have never seen a platoon leader of the south Korean army turning against an American adviser as you're doing now."

"I have also never seen a foreign officer who insults and sneers a platoon leader of the army of another nation in front of his men as you're doing now."

When their platoon leader said this, the soldiers buzzed again.

Fuming with anger, adviser John knew not how to behave.



The battalion commander who was standing by like a stake reading the face of John put in a word:

"Hey, you Platoon Leader! How dare you turn upon him? Mind who you're talking to. Do you think this is the university campus where you would fly into a demonstration at every opportunity? Do you think we don't know you were one of the prime organizers of campus demonstrations? We know full well you have seditious thoughts."

"You must not willfully brand another person as seditious. What's wrong with my thoughts? My thinking is normal and my head is clear."

John spat out:

"We don't need a platoon leader like you in the south Korean army!"

With this, he turned round and went away, shaking his head.

"Come to my office two hours later. Understand?"

The battalion commander thundered at him before he was off after John who was in his hasty retreat and got on the car.

The soldiers' indignation was almost coming to a bursting point. The platoon leader, clenching his teeth, stood staring angrily at the receding adviser and the battalion commander. My mind burned with a strong desire to put an end to everything at once. The soldiers shouted loudly:

"Son of a bitch! Does he think that adviser means everything?"

"He thinks this is America, does he?"

"What the devil does he think our platoon is that he behaves himself like that?"

"It's a sight to see, that bloke battalion commander.



Look at the sorry figure he cuts when he licks the boots of the adviser. Tut!"

"Rather better to cross over to the north after finishing off those bastards."

At these outspoken words of the soldiers, the platoon leader roared, "Chuck it, will you?" and set off for the unit. We walked after him in disorder.

The platoon leader went to the room of the battalion commander that evening. He was finally removed from the post of platoon leader for the reason that he had talked back to adviser John. He was then put to interrogation and got an order to leave the army.

We waited for him. When he returned to the platoon, he tore off the shoulder ensign from the disgraceful south Korean army uniform and drank a cupful of strong liquor from the bottle which had been left in a corner of his room.

Sensing that his men were watching him, he said:

"From today I'm not your platoon leader. Now I'm a civvy. Back to Seoul, I'm going to form a real food stealers' party and do all I can for the emancipation of hungry people from starvation, for the sake of truth and liberty. In the past days I spoke roughly to you and chastised you. But I hope you don't think ill of me. I was of one and the same mind as you.

"I remember a passage of the poem recited by my senior who fell on the plaza of April 19 uprising.

*To bring the tree of liberty into bloom  
Let us win back our spring.  
March ahead against the chilly wind.  
Let us take back my lost self  
To nurse it into our true self.*



“Men, I want you to become guardians of freedom and independence at any place, undaunted fighters for truth. Our road ahead is bright because the sun and the star in the sky are shining brilliantly over us.

“We shall meet again some day, I believe. Now, go back to the barracks.”

“Dear Platoon Leader!”

All the men called him and grasped his hands. Warm feelings flowed through their clasped hands.

That evening Platoon Leader Chang U told me in a friendly manner, putting his hand on my shoulder:

“We must avenge your mother’s death. Let’s always be together in the fight against the Americans and for independence. Let’s live looking up to the sun and the star.”

The platoon leader hugged me. Our hearts beat as one in our warm embrace.

A few days later, the platoon leader parted with us.

He left for Seoul by truck, leaving a cloud of dust behind. But word came that Platoon Leader Chang U died of a mortal wound in an overturn accident of the truck. It was a bolt from the blue. Further information said that US military adviser John and the battalion commander had plotted for his death by deliberately overturning the truck.

“You villains! Oh, dear Platoon Leader Chang U!”

I wailed, pounding the ground with my fists. The soldiers of our platoon howled with rage.

“Let’s finish off the Americans! Let’s smash everything!”

My heart boiled and emitted an irrepressible hatred like a flow of lava from an erupting volcano. That night I was sent out sentry duty. I asked Pfc. Choe and







Sergeant Pak for four more magazines. Then I got hold of eight grenades.

Late that night I left my sentry post and broke into the military advisers' room and pumped bullets into the chests of John and other American advisers. Then I rushed straight to the next house where the battalion commander was living and did away with the battalion commander and the education officer.

I feared nothing any more. An alarm was sounded in the battalion and the search unit and MPs were called out. Even in the darkness I ran as swiftly as the wind and reached the truce line. Once I was on the truce line, the line of demarcation between the north and the south, complex thoughts crowded in on my mind. Now I was standing on the fork of the roads in my life where I had to make up my mind to choose the road to a new life.

A thousand and one memories flashed through my mind—the difficult days when I worked my way through high school and university, the voices ringing out in the ideological circle, "Let us regain our self", the turbulent streets where I read out an appeal, my days in prison, the faces of my friends Jong Ho , Il Su, Sun O and my senior Mr. Chol Min, the dear Miss Sun I and Professor Cho Un Song who had been so kind to me, the tragic death of mother and father, the horrible days and nights of my life in the south Korean army, the faces of the platoon leader and my fellow soldiers, and so on.

In a blink of time contradicting thoughts passed through my mind.

"What shall I do? Must I go to the north? Once I'm off, I shall see my dear friends no more. But if I stay on in south Korea for this reason, I shall be shot to death.



“What shall I do? Which way should I take on the forked road of life and death?”

I hesitated for a second. Is it in the nature of man to hesitate like that at such a critical moment of life? Ah! I involuntarily held my head in my hands, and consulted my own reason. At this moment their chase after me must be at its height. If I stay on in this rotten society, my heart won't be filled with the joy of a blossoming dream but will be pierced by American bullet.

When my thought came to this point, I raised my head resolutely.

“I must go! I must go to the north! I must go to the north where our longed-for President Kim Il Sung and our respected Mr. Kim Jong Il are.

“I must go to the north always yearned after by Platoon Leader Chang U, the height of hope longed for always by Professor Un Song, and the blessed land which Miss Sun I would visualize while gazing up at the Big Dipper!

“Sun Il Miss Sun I who must be waiting for me! Adieu! I expect you to live stoutly in Seoul. Please understand me for going to the north without your consent. Let us meet again when our country is reunified. My dear Sun I, Sun Il

“Pfc. Choe, Sergeant Pak, Pfc. Yun, Corporal Ko, and my other dear companions in arms, good-bye. And Kang Sun Ho and Pak Il Su in Seoul! Let us meet in Seoul when the country is reunified.

“And my high school teacher Mr. Choe whose whereabouts I don't know, good-bye!”

Having bidden farewell inside to my teachers and friends and to Sun I, I moved forward under the cover of night until I reached the hidden post of the US army on



the truce line. Distrustful of the south Korean soldiers, the Americans had set up their hidden posts at some intervals. As I had already known the route to cross over to the north, I took out all my grenades and placed them close to me. Then, springing up, I hurled grenades into the Americans' post in succession. Flames spurted out and successive explosions drowned the shrieks of the American soldiers. The searching party and MPs rushed up to the scene. I sent bursts of shots into them emptying all my magazines. I kept firing away bullets laden with my pent-up wrath and resentments. I was shot through a leg. Draggig the wounded leg, I crossed the truce line and fell unconscious.

This was how I succeeded at last in coming over to the north which I had been yearning after so ardently.

When I came to and opened my eyes, I could not resist tears welling up in them.

On the white wall of the sick ward of hospital I saw portraits of the respected President Kim Il Sung and dear Mr. Kim Jong Il.

"Is this north Korea?" I asked getting up with a start.

"Yes, this is the northern half of the Republic where the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung and the dear leader Comrade Kim Jong Il reside," a pretty nurse in a snow-white overall replied in a gentle voice, with a bright smile.

Instantaneously all my worries melted away and tears rolled down my cheeks. As I was unable to get out of bed, I sat up in bed with the help of the nurse and paid my first respects reverentially before the portraits of the great President Kim Il Sung and the dear leader Mr. Kim Jong Il. Relieved of all worries, I wept and wept.



Is it that people usually shed tears when they are embraced by their fond father?

Now that I am in the embrace of the great President and the dear leader who I revered and longed for as the sun and the star wherever I was — in Seoul, on the shore of Archipelago and in the areas along the truce line, what a lucky man I am!

This was how I escaped from the inferno and came to the land of bliss.

## Afterword

When I took up the pen to write memoirs about my escape from south Korea, I was ambitious. But now when I have finished it, I cannot help admitting to my great regret that it leaves much to be desired.

It is not so easy for man to desert the place where he has lived for long and come over to a new land for a new life.

The turning point in his life when he goes away from old world to cross over to a new world, is beset with countless circumstances. Here I have given only a part of my complex circumstances.

I shall be very happy if you reader understand from my humble memoirs that south Korea is a land of darkness unfit for human habitation.

What I want to emphasize in concluding this book is that north Korea is the blessed land looked up as a garden of Eden by the south Korean people.

In north Korea I saw a Utopia for human beings, a real paradise for the people. I think I shall be able to tell you of this some day in the future.



I have a word to speak to my old teachers, friends and acquaintances in the south. I hope that you will keep the promise that even in the inferno you will fight unyieldingly, looking up to the great President Kim Il Sung and dear Mr. Kim Jong Il as the "sun of Juche" and the "guiding star" whom we respect so that we can meet happily after the country is reunified. I expect that at that future time you will proudly stand before the country, friends and the cause of national unification.

Wishing the respected leader President Kim Il Sung, the great sun, the dear leader Mr. Kim Jong Il, who hold the destinies of our compatriots, all our people and all mankind on their shoulders, a long life and good health, and renewing the determination to live and work as their son and to be loyal to them, I lay down my pen.

Kim Yong Son

December 1984







*Printed in the Democratic People's  
Republic of Korea*

**NO. 90871**









PYONGYANG, KOREA

1989

